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ABSTRACT

Advice and tested methods for management of meetings from superintendents and board members are combined in this reference book on conducting effective school board meetings. Intended for a wide readership, it contains three chapters and an exhibit section comprising over one-third of the document. Following a brief introduction, chapter 1, "Planning: Setting the Scene for Success," presents first-hand experiences of meeting planners who suggest ways to improve meeting planning procedures. From long-range needs--such as building the policy foundation upon which effective meetings rest--to setting the next meeting agenda, detailed recommendations are provided. Short-term planning means that the agenda must be prepared, the stage set, and the participants prepared. "Performing: The School Board in Action," chapter 2, covers essential tasks of meeting participants: board president, members, and superintendent and administrators. Chapter 3, "Following Up: The Superintendent's Communications," examines significant tasks and establishes accountability for their completion. The exhibits include parliamentary rules, sample agendas, room seating arrangements, and meeting evaluation checklist. Sample policies include board-superintendent relationship, new member orientation, public hearings, agenda format, voting methods, and public participation. (CJH)

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HOLDING EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

EA 019 458

A Joint Publication of the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association

HOLDING EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

Reviewed and approved by
the Joint AASA-NSBA Committee

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The Board's Role in Selecting the Administrative Team
Compensating the Administrative Team
Compensating the Administrative Team (Full Report)

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The Administrative Leadership Team
Evaluating the Superintendent
The Role of a Consultant in a Superintendency Search

Key board-administrator publications include:

Roles and Relationships . . . School Boards and Superintendents
Goal Setting and Self Evaluation of School Boards

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FOREWORD

The public school board meeting can be an extraordinary event. Here people from all walks of life, representing many sides of public opinion, can observe elected or appointed board members in action and attempt to influence their local schools.

Picture this: At least once each month, more than 95,000 citizens, chosen to represent the nation's 16,000 school districts, meet and make decisions that affect the future of more than 40 million students. These school boards set policy on what will be taught and how, on who will teach and who will administer. Working with administrators, they determine what school facilities and support services are needed and act on school budgets.

Local school boards, acting in accordance with state and federal law, can make these decisions only at properly convened school board meetings. That's the law, and that is why school administrators and board members have long recognized the importance of the public school board meeting.

Alone, these reasons would be enough to prompt the joint publication by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) of this handbook on management of meetings. AASA represents administrators who are the chief planners of board meetings, and NSBA represents board members who are the chief participants.

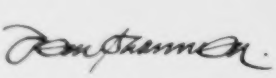
But there is yet another reason why we've chosen to publish this handbook, a reason that makes this book a must reference for both school board members and school administrators. The school board meeting has become the chief vehicle for two-way communication between school officials and a public that is more interested than ever in its schools. Concerned citizens have rediscovered the school board meeting as the place where basic school policies are set and available resources are allocated. The public's desire to be part of these important decisions has been a prime force behind the passage of today's open meeting laws that

require school boards to discuss, as well as to decide, issues in public.

Increased public interest and participation in local school board meetings represent just one more incentive to school officials to improve the effectiveness of school board meetings. A well-planned and smoothly executed meeting shows that school officials not only can get the job done, but that they know how to do it in an effective manner. A well-run meeting can help win the public's enduring support for its schools.

In the pages that follow, school board meeting planners and participants — your colleagues in administrative offices and in board rooms across the country — offer their best advice on the management of meetings. We hope you will find this joint AASA-NSBA publication helpful in making your meetings even more effective in assuring high quality education for the students of your community.

Paul B. Salmon, Ed.D.
Executive Director
American Association
of School Administrators



Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director
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Association

INTRODUCTION

This book is not about **why** effective school board meetings are important. It's **not** about:

- How important board meetings are as a form of representative government.
- How they represent the only time when board members, acting in concert with their professional administrative advisers, can legally exercise their power and responsibility to make momentous decisions about school programs, annual budgets, personnel, and more.
- How crucial effective board decisions are to the lives of children.
- How citizens want to participate more directly in those decisions.
- How board meetings have, in fact, become a prime vehicle for two-way communication between school officials and their communities.
- How the public bases its judgment on the quality of all school operations on the quality of the leadership it views at board meetings.

These reasons for concentrating on making school board meetings even more effective are fundamental. They are ingrained in the very hearts and minds — and possibly the taxpaying pocketbooks — of all who plan, participate in, or observe board meetings.

HOW TO IMPROVE MEETINGS: THAT IS THE QUESTION

This book presumes that most will agree meetings should be more effective and moves swiftly into the "how." How, for instance, can we make sure precious meeting time is well spent? How can we manage controversy before it manages us? How can we avoid surprises, arrange board room seating, and evaluate ourselves?

From big "How's" to small ones, this book covers the details essential to productive board meetings. The advice and tested methods for effective management of meetings comes from superintendents and board mem-

bers across the country, from people who have unselfishly shared the best — and worst — of their experiences.

HERE ARE SOME ANSWERS

This book has been prepared primarily for local school board members and administrators. All should have a copy. It provides a fingertip reference for school staff members, parents, and other residents, and students who want to understand better how school board meetings are run. It provides help for those who want to learn how to effectively bring their concerns before public school officials. It also provides valuable orientation information for new school board members and could serve as a text for students of educational administration.

For meeting planners. Chapter one presents first-hand experiences of meeting planners who suggest ways to improve planning procedures for board meetings. From long-range planning needs — such as building the policy foundation upon which effective meetings rest — to setting the next meeting agenda, Chapter 1 provides important advice.

For meeting participants. Chapter 2 covers essential tasks of all meeting participants, such as: the special role of the board president, the equally vital job of all board members, and the major support roles of the superintendent and other administrators.

For those who follow through on meeting decisions. Just as a series of events leads up to a board meeting, another series of events follows the meeting. Chapter 3 examines key tasks and establishes accountability for their completion.

Effective board meetings require team work and a spirit of shared responsibility from the entire governance team, better yet, from the entire school community.

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Before turning to the first chapter, take heart in the fact that you are not alone in seeking ways to improve board meetings, nor in finding the going tough. The governing body of any public institution, meetings experts say, must face obstacles in its public sessions that no private sector group ever meets. The mere formality of the public meeting can be intimidating. The size of the meeting, because of public participation, often makes management more difficult. In addition, the agenda of a public school board meeting contains compulsory items with mixed purposes, which can confuse the meeting's purpose and direction.

The task of improving the effectiveness of school board meetings is before us. Improvement is possible. Let's be on with the task.

CHAPTER ONE

Planning: setting the scene for success

"A smooth board meeting is 90 percent preparation and 10 percent performance," says an Ohio superintendent. Although many board members and superintendents say the impact of these two tasks is more equal, no school leader underestimates the value of adequate board meeting preparation.

In a recent AASA survey conducted for this publication, school administrators were adamant about the need for planning of board meetings. Many had learned how crucial planning is to an effective board meeting the hard way — by trial and error.

Tasks involved in planning board meetings fall into two groups: **long-range tasks** that set the tone and pace for all of a school board's meetings, and **short-range activities** that relate only to the meeting that is around the corner. Let's first see what farsighted planners do for the long term. Then, when we move on to short-term planning, we will have a solid foundation for mapping out the plan for a single board meeting.

THREE KEY JOBS FOR THE LONG HAUL

"We can't overemphasize how quickly many board meeting problems disappear once school officials stop thinking of board meetings as isolated events," say practitioners of long-range planning. They explain it this way: If school officials look into the distant future, they will see board meeting after meeting, each discrete but, together, they become a single chain of events leading to a district goal. Each board meeting is, in essence, the tip of an iceberg in a whole sea of school district activity that flows up to each board meeting with recommendations and flows out of the board room with renewed direction and authority. The single board meeting becomes the beginning and end of a continuous cycle of meetings involving all who have a stake in the public schools: parents and other residents, board members, administrators, teachers and support staff, and students.

School board meetings involve people as well as plans. The success of a board meeting often depends as much on how well people pull together as on whether a plan is accomplished. To put it another way, using the words of meeting experts, meetings not only have **task** goals, but also **process** goals. The school board's approval of a controversial curriculum is an example of a task goal. If the board majority reaches its decision in a manner that wins the support of a hostile audience, that's a process victory.

What does this have to do with long-range planning? A great deal. Let's examine three key tasks that successful board meeting planners continually emphasize over the long haul to ensure that their short-term goal — public support — is easier to achieve. These tasks include:

- Clarifying the board/superintendent relationship.
- Establishing the board's own rules for procedure.
- Developing and maintaining the board policy manual.

As we shall see, each of these activities has both task and process goals.

Clarifying the Board-Superintendent Relationship

In and out of board meetings, effective superintendents and board members know their own jobs, and know how to get them done. They know, too, what their job is **not**. No more would a good board member, for instance, list administrative responsibilities on a job description for a board member than a superintendent would place policy making on the job description for a superintendent.

This mutual understanding of roles is critical to the success of board meetings. Also, a clear definition of roles helps ensure that, in the preparation of each meeting agenda, only those items that belong before the

board get there. Time or energy should not be wasted on matters that clearly are the responsibility of the administration.

What is the Board's Business?

"The most effective board members keep a policy perspective," says a North Carolina school superintendent. Says a board member: "The best superintendents can assess the administrative impact of policy and balance economic realities with student needs." Those two statements show that the textbook definition of where the board's role ends (policy making) and the administration's role begins (policy advice and implementation) is alive and well. The two jobs are probably not absolutely distinct in any school district; but there are legal and practical reasons for continuing to strive toward the textbook ideal. For example, the law delegates policy making to the board. And, superintendents have the practical training in how to run schools.

On the other hand, the ideal line is sometimes blurred by realities: Superintendents establish policies when they act in the absence of board policy — when crises demand it; when their boards have neglected to make policy; when they intentionally usurp their board's authority to make policy, because they presume they know best; or because they simply want the power to decide. Likewise, school boards delve into regulation — when state or federal laws mandate it, when superintendents neglect it, or when human nature or personal power needs lead toward it.

The point is that school officials are people. Superintendents and boards must carve out their own relationships, must reach their own particular understandings about where the board-superintendent line will be drawn. Then they must work within that framework.

How to accomplish these tasks

Three things. First, if your district doesn't already have one, develop a policy on the board-superintendent relationship.

(See The "Sample Policies" section.)

Don't skip the drudgery of writing something down just because relations are good now. By all means, capture the moment. Catalogue how responsibilities are divided before the fragile human balance shifts. If relations are not now smooth, but the board and superintendent want to salvage their relationship, policy development is still the best route to take. In the process of development, a truce may be signed.

Second, once the basic policy defines the relationship, don't ignore it. "Superintendents who keep the board informed will be more effective," advises a New York superintendent, and he isn't referring to a quick update just prior to a board meeting. Regular, formal and informal communication nurtures the board-superintendent relationship. If these communications go both ways, mutual trust and respect will result.

To ensure that systematic, two-way communication takes place, the

board and superintendent should agree on and put into policy just how the superintendent will communicate with the board, and what procedures board members will follow when communicating with the superintendent. Special consideration should be given to how board members and the superintendent will interact informally. Superintendents cannot do their jobs — as directed by the whole board — if they spend all their time talking with an individual board member or serving an individual board member's needs for information. Also, superintendents shouldn't favor, or be placed in a position of appearing to favor, an individual board member; and they shouldn't be subject to undue influence or pressure from a board member.

Becoming a Better Board Member: A Guide to Effective School Board Service, recently published by NSBA, stresses: "When board and district concerns are at issue, the superintendent should not say anything to an individual board member that cannot be said to the board as a whole."

To enhance ongoing communication with their boards, a number of superintendents send a weekly memorandum to board members. These memos provide an informal "run-down" of what has happened during the week and what board members will need to do or pay attention to the following week.

For convenience, some superintendents put their weekly memos on a cassette recording. They may talk for 5 or 30 minutes about how things went that week; but they may also discuss in-depth the merits of an educational program. These superintendents might encourage board members to use the flip side of the cassette to communicate their questions or concerns.

Between meetings, communication is helpful in another way. It helps prevent nasty surprises in the board room.

A third method for keeping the board-superintendent relationship clear and ready for board meeting business is to establish a good orientation program for new board members and provide periodic professional development opportunities for the board as a whole. Training might focus on the tasks of boardsmanship and the people skills board members need to accomplish their tasks. Conflict resolution, consensus building, human relations, communications and group dynamics are just a few areas for professional development of board members.

An Illinois superintendent confirms: "I like best to work with board members who have assimilated knowledge of the district's operation through inservice activities." A colleague from Virginia stresses people skills: "My favorite board members view board membership as team membership," he says.

Team building is, indeed, the goal of all three tasks we listed — setting or reviewing policy; maintaining ongoing, open communication; and training. The very process of doing these things keeps the board- superintendent relationship thriving . . . and sets a pace for the second long-range planning job school board members and administrators must face.

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Establishing the Board's Own Operating Rules

If we may call the first long-range planning task **determining who plays which position on the school governance team**, the second might be called **establishing the rules of play**.

How often should the governance team hold a board meeting? For what purposes? Who may attend?

The purpose of setting operating rules is two-fold. First, in most states, law requires boards to establish operating rules. Second, rules ensure that both the task and process goals of any one meeting are more likely to be met. Rules, consistently applied:

- Help keep the board meeting focused on the agenda (task)
- Ensure that no action is taken without adequate information and preparation (task).
- Ensure that group decision-making efforts are clear, orderly, fair, and legal (process).
- Ensure that the majority shall rule, while the rights of minorities are protected (process).
- Help to clarify the board-superintendent relationship (process).

These benefits will accrue only to the board that makes its rules in advance and has a long-range plan for monitoring how the rules are applied. Even then, rules will not solve all problems at any board meeting. No matter how great they are, a board's operating rules seldom stop the human dynamics of any assembly of people.

Operating rules for school boards need not be as detailed as those for larger assemblies. They must, however, be clear. That means they must be written out and adopted by the school board as policy or bylaws, studied by new board members in orientation sessions, and reviewed by veteran board members as needed.

Here are the chief provisions school boards — working with their administrators and attorney — should cover in their policies on meeting procedures:

Types of formal board meetings

State law usually dictates the purposes for which school boards may meet. A board's policies should specify the legal reasons for and conditions under which the board may meet. Special requirements, such as meeting notices, should be included in policy.

In making policy on board meetings and other matters that are influenced by law, some boards quote directly or restate state law as part of their policies. Other boards, however, believe that this practice is inappropriate because of the danger of misstatement. The main objective of a board's policies on board meetings should be to clarify the board's legal authority for conducting specific business and to ensure that the intent of the law is carried out.

Meeting About The Curriculum

Since teaching and learning are the ultimate reasons for the existence of school boards, curricular items should consume a significant portion of board meeting time.

This does not mean that board members should become instructional experts: They hire an entire professional staff for that. Nor does it mean any board member should use meeting time to urge passage of a program he or she personally favors. (A balanced program with opportunities for all children should be the board's goal.)

Instead, here are three ways a board's responsibility for curriculum might translate into agenda items.

Policy

Just as a board's first job in all areas of school operations is policy making, so it is with instructional matters. Some of the myriad of subjects appropriate for instructional policies are:

- Basic instructional goals and program.
- Curriculum development, adoption, and evaluation.
- Teaching methods.
- Class size.
- Homework.
- Graduation requirements.
- Guidance and counseling.
- Selection of textbooks and other learning materials.

Evaluation

Are the board's instructional policies effective? Well administered? Reflective of children's needs? Adequately funded? Regular reports at board meetings keep the board informed, results-oriented, and alerted to potential policy problems.

Information

Sometimes agendas include reports about existing or proposed programs that require no immediate action:

- Staff explanations of existing programs for new board members.
- Board or staff committee reports on proposed new programs.
- Reports by the superintendent on matters such as the teachers who received the board's summer curriculum development grants.

All three types of curricular items are appropriate for board meeting agendas. But should an agenda mix instructional items with items about general school operations? Many boards do mix these items and the practice works well as long as the item is not so controversial that it will consume more than its fair share of meeting time.

Special meeting. Discussion about changing old or adopting new programs may deserve a special meeting. A school district in Nebraska spotlights the curriculum in a separate meeting each month, reserving routine business for a second meeting. "This keeps all of us conscious of — and devoted to — our number one task, educating kids," the superintendent reports.

■ **Annual or organizational meeting**. In many states, once each year, soon after board member elections, the board must by law meet to take care of certain housekeeping chores: New members must be sworn in, officers elected, rules of procedure reviewed. Often at this meeting, a board will set the schedule for the coming year's regular meetings. All of this information needs to be placed where anyone in the school community can readily find it — in the district's policy manual.

■ **Regular meetings**. The board should have a policy to clarify what state law says about the minimum number of times the board must meet to conduct its regular business—once or twice a month, for example. This policy also should specify where and when regular meetings will be held (if this is not covered in the annual meeting policy), the kinds of business that will be discussed and acted upon, public notification procedures, and so on.

■ **Special or adjourned meetings**. In addition to regularly scheduled meetings, state laws generally provide for boards to hold additional meetings when, for example, urgent business cannot wait for the next regular session or when there's not enough time in the regular meeting to conduct all scheduled business. (Warning: Too many special meetings may indicate inefficient use of meeting time, or of a poor board/superintendent relationship.) A board's policy on special or adjourned meetings should note the purposes for which the local board may hold special sessions, who may call them, and what the notification procedures are for board members and the public. Usually, only publicized items may be discussed at these meetings.

■ **Executive or closed sessions**. Certain subjects on which boards must take action may be discussed in private, although action must be taken in public session. State laws vary as to which topics are best discussed out of the public eye, but common to most states are some or all of these: personnel actions; property purchases; pending legal action; student disciplinary actions; employee negotiations; and security arrangements.

These and other matters in which confidentiality may be required by state law should be listed in a board's policy on executive sessions. Also included should be other details pertinent to executive sessions, such as procedures for convening these meetings.

■ **Public hearings**. Besides regular, special, and executive sessions, boards also conduct hearings to ascertain public opinion on various subjects that may eventually require board action. Some public hearings may be required by law, such as those on the budget. For public hearings other than those required by law, the majority of the board must approve the subject of the hearing. The board usually also must set the date, time, and place for each public hearing, and adopt any special rules on the length of time each speaker may have. All this should be covered in a board policy on public hearings.

■ **Applicability of open meeting laws**. Each of these types of meetings has three common elements. Each is **prearranged**, its purpose is to

discuss or decide **public business**, and it is held by a **majority** of the members of a public body. That means, in states with open meeting or sunshine laws, that the public has every right to be present during both the deliberation (except in the case of executive sessions) and the decisions on each issue on the board's meeting agenda.

Open meeting or sunshine laws have solid grounds for existence. They not only recognize the public's right to know; they also make available to school officials a wealth of public knowledge. Furthermore, as leaders at all levels of government have learned in recent years, secrecy in government undermines public faith.

For all these reasons, a more participatory decision-making climate is at work across the nation, in both public and private enterprises.

Open meeting laws may be well-founded, but they do not necessarily require boards to permit public participation. Boards, in fact, have a responsibility to regulate public participation in discussions as they see fit. And boards must be sure the public understands that the final decision is the board's alone to make.

Types of informal board meetings

Open meeting laws, though they vary from state to state, usually apply to several kinds of informal gatherings of board members as well as to formal board meetings. To be sure, boards should double check state law.

In the meantime, board members can police themselves by remembering the three elements that underlie most open meeting laws: (1) prearranged meetings (2) of the board majority (3) to discuss public business. The idea is to avoid meeting in a manner that could be interpreted as an attempt to circumvent the law. Apply the three-part test to the following and any other informal gatherings of board members.

- **Board committee meetings**. In states where board committees are allowed, open meeting laws usually apply to meetings of committees whose membership numbers a majority of the board (committee-of-the-whole), and to committees consisting of one or more board members, but less than a board majority (committees-of-the-board).

Boards that convene as a committee-of-the-whole, for example, should invite the public to their discussion sessions if the subject of discussion is not one of the topics exempt from public participation by state law. Otherwise, a board may find itself in the legally murky area of having met in a kind of closed session that the public had every right to attend.

Operating as a committee-of-the-whole offers a number of advantages, especially to the small school board. In particular:

- There is more time than at a regular board meeting to study an issue in depth.
- The whole board receives all the information pertinent to whatever the committee studies.
- The community gets the best thinking of the entire board before the board acts.

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- The board-superintendent line is kept relatively clear.

Use of board committees (wherein the board members study an issue — such as the budget, review public opinion on the topic, and make a recommendation to the full board) can tap individual board member talents, and save the whole board from in-depth research into every topic. Large boards use board committees more often than smaller boards.

A number of states, however, do not allow these types of committees. And many school leaders readily point out numerous disadvantages of using board committees:

- The whole board may never get the full picture of issues explored by a few board members.
- The board may question the committee's judgment, increasing factional disputes.
- The administration's work skyrockets with each additional committee for which it must provide support services.
- Board committees tend to get involved in administrative work, clouding the board-superintendent relationship.
- There's a tendency to accept or adopt committee recommendations without much board discussion; and such "rubber stamping" substitutes the thinking of some board members for the thinking of the entire group.
- "Rubber stamping" of committee recommendations can cause poor public relations — not only does it not look good, but it usually usurps the public's right to observe board deliberations and leaves no room for public input.
- Board committees often provide a strong superintendent, board member, or special interest group with a mechanism for manipulating board decisions.

In summary, it appears that the day when committees of the board were truly needed and useful may have come and gone. As NSBA's *Becoming a Better Board Member* points out: "In the past, when professionally trained administrators were scarce and school boards had large memberships, standing committees assisted the administration in its daily responsibilities. As professional administrators have assumed the primary responsibility for managing the schools, and boards have become more concerned with establishing educational goals and policies, the arguments against using standing committees have grown."

School leaders who use committees of the board say it is important for everyone to know that a board committee cannot and should not make decisions for the entire board. Because of open meeting laws, no official action can be taken at any of these meetings that are closed or held without public notice.

Other tips about the use of board committees include:

- Don't have so many committees of the board that the entire board doesn't have enough time in regular session to hear and deliberate on committee reports.

- Make sure that each committee understands its responsibilities and its limits.
- Don't have so many committees that individual board members spend too much of their available time in committee meetings.
- In making committee assignments, don't let an individual board member become overburdened with committee work. More than likely, the board member will burn out quickly or become involved in school administration.

A major point to remember is that a board committee should operate to facilitate board decisions, not to avoid board deliberation and determination on policy issues.

- **Work sessions, conventions, conferences**. It is best to consider planned work sessions as subject to open meeting laws if a majority of the board is present and if the board is discussing public business. *Work session*, in this sense, is actually synonymous with executive, closed, or committee-of-the-whole meetings. If, however, the topic of such sessions — or of *conventions* or *conferences* — involves improving boardsmanship, open meeting laws may not apply in some states, since public business is not the meeting topic, even though a majority of the board is present at a planned meeting.
- **Dinners, telephone calls**. Again, just keep the three elements in mind: Is a board majority somehow gathering, in a prearranged fashion, to discuss public business? Whether a meeting of minds is sought in a series of telephone conversations or in one conference call, in many dinners or one, the open meeting laws will be violated if the intent is to get around them.

Parliamentary procedure

Any type of board meeting—open or closed, formal or informal — may flounder if board members have not agreed in advance on parliamentary procedure. A pre-established set of parliamentary rules enables the entire board to move swiftly through its business at the same time it ensures all participants an opportunity to be heard.

Caution: Adhering too strictly to rules of procedure can cut off the very interaction and dialogue that board meetings hope to accomplish. Only 19 percent of all school boards, in fact, stick strictly to every rule of procedure, according to the most recent survey on the subject by the National School Boards Association (1976). A full 71 percent operate their meetings "in a formal manner, with reference as needed to parliamentary procedure." The remainder make little or no reference to formal rules.

Because they involve more people and more issues, boards usually follow parliamentary procedure more closely in their regular, open meetings, than they do in less formal settings.

Whether they are followed more or less closely, however, rules of procedure provide a necessary structure and are best set out in policy. Many board policies simply cite the old standby, *Robert's Rules of Order*, as the

parliamentary reference for their deliberations. Others consider that reference, originally intended to guide the deliberations of much larger bodies, unwieldy. Among this group is the New Jersey School Boards Association, which recommends the much abbreviated *Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance*, by O. Garfield Jones. A second simple source is *Parliamentary Procedure: Tool of Leadership*, by King Broadrick.

Some boards prefer to set out their own rules of procedure, however. For sample rules recommended especially for school boards by the Institute of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, see Exhibit One.

Whatever the board elects to do, its policy should note topics on which state law may require the board to proceed in a manner different from generally accepted rules. For example, many boards actually adopt policy after a "second reading." Some require a "third reading" before action is taken.

It is a board president's job to enforce the board's rules, but every board member has the responsibility to help the president keep the board meeting on track. A board, however, may want to designate a board member or the superintendent as board parliamentarian to save everyone from having to commit to memory all of the fine points of the board's rules of procedure.

Substantive and Procedural Motions

The greatest waste of board meeting time, say superintendents and board members alike, is:

- Discussing items past the point of productivity.
- Going off on a tangent.
- Rehashing opinion.

Sound familiar? Each of these time-wasters, which all boards experience from time to time, can reach chronic proportions if no policy establishes how to keep board discussions focused.

The board's agenda

"The worst board meeting I ever attended," admits a Michigan school superintendent, "was one with an absolutely open agenda and not one fixed topic." Hard as it is to imagine, some school officials apparently do attempt to meet without an agenda. Many others admit that poorly planned agendas can be a prime cause of meeting inefficiency.

Two policies can quickly reduce the problem. First, every board needs a policy on how the agenda will be prepared and disseminated. Included must be provisions devoted to:

- Who is responsible for preparing the agenda.
- How and when members of the school community can place items on the agenda.
- Requirements for background information.

■ Instruction on who gets copies when.

Also included should be a provision for adding items to the agenda at a board meeting. A Nebraska superintendent recalled an incident when a board president refused to allow anyone in an audience of more than 200 people to address the board because the discussion was not on the preset agenda. "He made them come back two weeks later, which they did — en masse and angry!" he reported.

A second policy should establish the order of business on the agenda and include a procedure for changing that order during the meeting. A board member from Michigan tells how he learned that lesson: "Just try requiring a restless and even hostile crowd to sit waiting until the end of a meeting, just because the item of interest to them appears very late in the agenda. The result is frustration for everyone."

Another reason to reorder the agenda: If a reporter is present to cover a particularly controversial board action, and the board wants balanced coverage, the board can help the reporter meet a deadline by moving the item forward on the agenda. Press deadlines often fall before board meetings end.

Board quorum

How many board members must be present if the board's decisions are to be legally binding? The simple answer: a majority of the actual board membership, 50 percent plus one. But the board's policy on this subject may need a little legal research. In Ohio, for example, three-fourths of the full board must be present to vote on the selection of a new school superintendent.

Board voting method

Board members have a duty to vote, and a policy on board voting methods should say so. Board members, after all, are on the board to stand up and be counted. Policy, consistent with state law, should provide, however, for the board to excuse members from voting on matters involving their own financial interest or official conduct. In addition, policy may require that the vote of any member who is not excused for personal reasons, but nevertheless abstains from voting, be counted as an affirmative vote.

A policy on this topic should also note any special voting methods required by state law. In Pennsylvania, for example, a roll call vote of a majority of the full board is required on many topics — from fixing the length of the school year, to creating indebtedness, to adopting textbooks. Other topics — such as dismissing personnel — require a roll call vote of two-thirds of the full board. All other business may be conducted by voice vote.

Board minutes

State laws generally require boards to keep minutes, but vary in the

amount and manner of recordkeeping required. A board's policy should spell out whether the official records will cover: a simple record of voting, a summary of discussion plus voting action, or a verbatim transcript of discussion and action. Other essential policy details:

- Who will keep minutes.
- Who will receive the minutes.
- How and when the board will approve the minutes.

The board may want to authorize that minutes be indexed each year, so that information about past actions will be easier to locate.

Public participation at board meetings

The worst board meeting headaches often result from "letting the public take over the meeting," says an Illinois board member. Sure clues that is happening include:

- A person with a complaint talks on without a time limit, repeating what already has been said.
- Members of the audience comment from their chairs without being recognized and identifying themselves.
- Members of the audience talk to each other or debate board members, instead of addressing all comments to the board chairman.

Most of these difficulties will disappear with a firm policy, firmly enforced on this topic and a chairperson who exercises control of the meeting. A policy should welcome the public, invite participation and clarify rules for that participation. These rules might include:

- At what particular point in the agenda the public will be recognized.
- Would-be speakers should sign in at the door.
- The board will refer all items of an administrative nature to the superintendent, rather than hear them at the meeting.
- The board may limit the time for each speaker.
- All comments must be made to the board chairman.

News media services

Ongoing relations with the news media greatly affect the manner in which board action is reported, so a board's policy describing which news media services it will provide at board meetings is important. If the superintendent and school board regularly provide information between meetings, chances are reporters will be better able to report objectively on decisions made at board meetings. To help reporters with meeting coverage, boards might provide for:

- A regular spokesperson who works with the news media.
- Agenda packets available in advance.
- The possibility of rearranging the agenda order to meet press deadlines.
- Seating arrangements that accommodate people who have to write about or record proceedings for radio or television.
- Other items as their chief administrators recommend.

Reporting board meeting business

"It seems inexcusable when a superintendent fails to follow up on any board action," says an understanding California board president, "but of course it can happen in any district." To put it another way: Even the best of superintendents suffer from a few of the frailties most humans have in common — forgetfulness, procrastination or just plain too much to do.

Board policy won't solve everything, but it can give direction as to the kind of reports the board believes should follow board action. It's reasonable for a board to expect reports to go to everyone affected by or interested in meeting results, including news releases for the general public, memoranda to staff, and letters to individuals.

Evaluation of school board proceedings

"I reconstruct every meeting myself," says a California school superintendent. The board encourages an evaluation of board meeting effectiveness through policy.

Bylaws and more bylaws. They're a task to develop and monitor; but the process of doing so almost always results in the essential, shared understanding of how board meetings should proceed. They are, moreover, just one part of the policy foundation that farsighted administrators and board members use to build an adequate, long-range perspective into board meetings . . . which brings us to the third long-range task essential to effective meetings management.

Developing and Maintaining the Board's Policy Manual

No doubt about it. Board meetings are most productive when the board sticks to policy making.

Says a New York superintendent of the best board president the superintendent ever had: "The president had the talent to keep the board perspective geared to policy development, planning, and evaluation." "When board members try to administer," agrees a North Carolina superintendent, "it only wastes board meeting time."

The policy perspective is a wonderful view, all agree, because the board's policy collection is, in a sense, the school district's long-range plan. If the board's policy manual is well-organized and up-to-date, it can give day-to-day operations — and school board meetings — these benefits:

- **Policies foster stability and continuity**. Board members may come and go and staff depart for new horizons, but policies endure. In the face of change, policies allow smooth transitions.
- **Policies inform everyone of board goals**. Because board members are selected to represent the community's school interests, they have a responsibility to report precisely how they see those interests. The written policy collection relates the board's goals and positions in major educa-

tional and operations areas.

- **Policies clarify the board-superintendent relationship**. Because policies tell broadly what the board believes should happen and why, they give the superintendent a clear guide to administer the schools.
- **Policies save time and effort for the superintendent**. When problems arise in the superintendent's office — when someone criticizes a popular library book, for instance, or when a new group wants to use school facilities — the superintendent can use the board's standing statements to determine how the board would want the situation resolved. No extra trip to the board room is needed for each decision.
- **Policies save time and effort for the board**. Because policies clearly say what the board wants the superintendent to do, they save the board from getting involved in what should be an administrative job. At board meetings, for instance, the same old problems won't crop up time and again. The board president can simply say, "Didn't we pass a policy on this last year? Then the superintendent can handle this one."

Chief areas of responsibility

The board in a moderately sized school district may have somewhere between 150 and 200 policies if it is giving adequate guidelines in its chief areas of responsibility. These areas are:

- **Basic foundations and commitments** —— those policies that recount the board's commitment to accountability, set out its educational philosophy, and stress its determination to evaluate its goals and operations periodically.
- **Board operations** —— all those bylaws listed earlier in this book, plus statements on the board's legal status, board officer duties, procedures for policy development, and board-staff relations.
- **School administration** —— all those policies that describe the superintendent's terms of employment, duties and responsibilities, management team and district organization, and relationship with the board.
- **Fiscal matters** —— everything about how money comes into and leaves the district.
- **Support services** —— the board's guidelines on the school lunch program, transportation services for staff and students, maintenance, and building security.
- **Facilities** —— policies on building new, remodeling old, and disposing of obsolete facilities; and policies on using portable classrooms.
- **Personnel** —— everything about hiring, orienting, placing, paying, evaluating, firing, and retiring support and professional staff members.
- **Instruction** —— all policies on what is to be taught, the texts that will be used, how achievement will be measured, and the extracurricular activities that will be offered.
- **Students** —— policies on how students are assigned to schools, what rights they have when they get there, and what pupil personnel services are available.

■ **Community relations** —— policies on who may use school facilities; and on the hows and whys of establishing excellent communication, such as good relations with the community, press, governmental agencies, and other educational institutions.

The content of board meetings will never be trivial if the content is predominately policy.

THREE KEY TASKS FOR THE SHORT HAUL

Three key tasks for the short haul —— "No wind favors he who has no destined port," the old saying goes.

It rings true for administrators and board members whose awesome job is to steer their ship of schools to some safe harbor. Without a map, without some continually evolving plan about the district's ultimate destination, the primary vehicle for plotting the district's immediate course — the school board meeting — can lose a large part of its effectiveness. But with long-term plans in process, plans for upcoming board meetings may proceed apace.

Before each and every school board meeting, three things must be done without fail. It doesn't matter that long-range plans are incomplete. Long-range plans, in one sense, are never complete because people change, what they want changes, and how they agree to work together changes. The board room show must go on, whatever the state of board-superintendent relations, rules of procedure, or the board's policy manual.

With or without long-range plans in process, then, these three tasks absolutely must occur before any successful board meeting:

- The agenda must be prepared.
- The stage must be set.
- The participants must be prepared.

The superintendent primarily is responsible for each task, but the board president plays a major role in short-term planning too.

Exactly how these two chief meeting planners handle each task will differ among districts, but one facet of meeting planning should not: Plan but don't overplan, meetings experts caution.

To err on the side of too-rigid planning makes participants think they've been assembled to hear proclamations. Too-little planning, though, leads at best to unfinished business and, at worst, to long meetings and high emotions.

Preparing the Agenda

A good agenda benefits school board meetings in at least four ways:

- It informs participants about upcoming issues.
- It thereby reduces anxiety about what's to happen.
- It provides the president with a means to organize meeting time.
- It gives the president a tool for having a sense of control over the meeting.

What comprises a good agenda? The consensus of school superintendents seems to be that it is one that pays special attention to content, sequence, and style — all within the context of some general agenda-building rules.

Let's look at those general rules first, then proceed to specific rules on how to select agenda items, order them, and present them in the best format possible.

The Board Meeting as a Showcase for Human Endeavor

Meetings that are planned with the audience in mind have agendas that pay attention to the "human element," advises Lenore Greenberg, communications director for the New Jersey School Boards Association in the *Journal of Educational Communications* (Winter/1980). Her guidelines for making the board meeting a showcase for human endeavor stress building agendas with:

- **People-oriented content**. People like recognition, so feature outstanding contributions and achievements by staff. Introduce new staff; acknowledge retiring staff. Praise the volunteers for their work. Let staff members present highlights of their work on major educational programs. Feature kids, kids, kids,' as Greenberg writes, saying that parents don't miss a chance to see their kids display new knowledge and skills. Have a student (always accompanied by parent or teacher) lead the flag salute.
- **People-minded procedures**. Keep each meeting's showcase to no more than 30 minutes, and don't have one every meeting. Choose subjects carefully and plan thoroughly. This virtually will guarantee that each showcase is a critical success, and ensure its reputation as a worthwhile community event.

General agenda-building rules

Rule number one, as Willard Fox sees it, is that "nearly every superintendent and board have their own way of building and using an agenda." That individuality should not be lost as school officials pick through this book's collected advice on agenda-building practices. To Fox, professor of administration and supervision at North Carolina's Appalachian State University, preserving individuality does not mean that poor practices should be continued. "Almost all agendas can be improved, but any change

should be carefully tailored to the individual district," Fox says. Other general rules:

Plan with audience in mind

Just as movies must attract audiences to be box office hits and authors cannot ignore readers if they want best sellers, meeting planners cannot hope to win the school community's support for board decisions if they plan meetings without the audience in mind. Put another way, any superintendent or board member who has felt ennui at board meetings has probably looked out at an audience suffering from far greater boredom.

Keep all meetings short

"Set a limit of three hours" to any board meeting, advises a New York school superintendent. Others say that any meeting that runs beyond an hour and a half borders on the edge of diminishing returns. "Clear thinking falters as the clock goes round and, in turn, emotions take over," says John Lindelow in *Making Meetings More Effective*. He recommends meetings of one hour as ideal, and suggests a planned coffee break if the agenda forecasts a longer sitting.

In reality, according to an NSBA survey, only 20 percent of boards finish their meetings in less than two hours. It is, however, better to have several short meetings than one long one, perhaps clustering similar topics so that board members and others can focus their energy in one direction at a time.

Pull no surprises

Common sense tells us that the best decisions are made when people stick to the agenda and decide on only those issues they are prepared in advance to decide.

And yet, who has not witnessed the unanticipated at a board meeting? Audience members willingly surprise the board with a controversial issue, it seems, if board policy does not provide for orderly public participation — as one Texas superintendent attests. "A patron announced that his daughter had been raped in the high school building while a teacher stood by, doing nothing," he recalls. "Of course it wasn't true, but the damage was done. The story made the paper." Board members, too, have been guilty of surprises, as a California superintendent tells us. "At a meeting, weeks after the board had tentatively approved the new budget in a work session, a new board member produced his own budget and recommended its adoption," adding that the administration had no advance notification.

Guidelines on selecting content

Short meetings with no surprises not only indicate the meeting planners' attention to the needs of the audience — and board members — but also the planners' careful attention to selecting meeting content. Anyone may

recommend any content, according to the board's policy on agenda preparation, but the trick is to edit out those items that are outside the scope of board responsibility. The following rules of thumb tell how meeting planners — superintendents mainly — collect agenda items, and how they select those appropriate for board consideration.

Annual planning calendar

"Forgetting to place the budget levy certification on the agenda," says a Minnesota superintendent, "is the biggest error I ever made in putting together an agenda." One way to avoid forgetting agenda topics that occur on an annual or other consistent basis, advises a Texas superintendent, is to "review last year's agenda for the same month."

In other districts, superintendents draw up annual calendars or timelines of events that must occur at specific board meetings during the year. Included are those board actions required by law, such as approval of the budget or issuance of nonrenewal notices to certificated staff, as well as action on such long-range plans as updating the policy manual or reviewing the curriculum. Annual calendars ensure that major events — compulsory and planned — occur as needed and that everyone is prepared for them.

Last month's agenda

What was up for discussion on last month's agenda may well be up for action this month. Having that document on hand — and perhaps the one from the preceding month as well — gives the agenda drafter an instant visual reminder of old business that awaits board action. Some boards devote a portion of each meeting to discussing possible items that should be included on future agendas. This is an efficient way to ensure that the concerns of each board member are addressed by the board.

Meetings, memos, files

New ideas for board action come from lots of sources. "Our superintendent keeps a special board meeting notebook in his desk drawer to jot down items as he thinks of them," says a Texas board member. Other administrators brainstorm agenda items in pre-meeting staff sessions or circulate memoranda to staff asking for ideas. Ideas from the public often come directly to the superintendent; but board members, too, should get in the habit of referring all ideas from their constituents — especially complaints that otherwise might surface as surprises at meetings.

Still other administrators prepare files for the next two months' meetings at least, dropping in ideas as they surface from various sources.

No administrative items

With ideas in hand, the superintendent, working with the board president, has to determine what is appropriate for which type of the board's authorized sessions. No matter what the meeting type, "keep administra-

A Sample Annual Planning Calendar

Below are excerpts from the annual planning calendar of the Traverse City (Michigan) Area Public Schools for the 1981-82 school year.

October

1. Amend operating budget for 1981-82
2. Accept financial audit
3. Review graduation requirements
4. Select architect for junior high

November

1. Discuss school bus replacements
2. Curriculum critical review
3. Review board policies on students

December

1. Approve specifications for bus bidding
2. Review preliminary plans for junior high physical education facility
3. Graduation requirement decision
4. Curriculum/reading center services review
5. Review of workers' comp self-insurance
6. Review board policies on personnel

January

1. Approve purchase of buses/accept bids
2. Amend operating budget for current year
3. Curriculum critical review/comm. arts
4. Budget review

February

1. Midyear review administrators' evaluations, including superintendent
2. Midyear board inservice/self-evaluation
3. Receive bids for junior high physical education facility
4. Board policy/completion of all areas
5. Curriculum critical review/math & vocational education
6. Budget review

tive items off the agenda," advises a Virginia superintendent. This will occur almost automatically, the superintendent says, if the superintendent's style is to push decision making as far down the organization as it can go and still be handled competently. This style is the mark of a superintendent who knows the dividing line between board and administrative business, and between central office and building-level administration.

Agenda Drafting: A Two-People Job

It may be easy to take words right out of mouths, but it's really tough to put them in. People who ghostwrite speeches know that. So do superintendents faced with preparing the agendas that their board presidents speak and work from as they preside over meetings.

What topics does the speaker want to cover, in what order, to what depth? Just as speeches improve when wordsmiths collaborate with orators at key points in the speech-drafting process, board meetings run better when the superintendent and board president churn out the agenda together.

The key points for agenda-drafting collaboration as recommended by the California School Boards Association in its *Board Presidents' Handbook*, are:

- When the superintendent is ready to pick items for the agenda.
- When it's time to predict just how much meeting time each agenda item will consume.
- When the superintendent is formulating recommendations for each item.
- When the superintendent is determining what format to use when presenting background information to the board.

Once the drafting is over, there's a final task for the agenda-building team: rehearsal. For the same reasons that speeches sound better when practice precedes them, walking throught the agenda can take the kinks out of board meetings. Rehearsal involves figuring out likely barriers to reaching meeting goals and analyzing probable participant behavior. Rehearsal questions: Who might be for or against the item, and how strongly will each person feel? What are critical points for compromise? Who needs encouragement to talk? Who is always prepared?

Watch timing

A Michigan superintendent once witnessed this poorly timed duo of events at the same meeting: Item one was recognition of a group of citizens that wanted to oust the superintendent; item two was a report of the board's official evaluation of the superintendent.

Time limits

Most agendas note, right at the top, the time the board meeting will begin. A growing number of boards also note the approximate hour of adjournment, and the starting and ending time for each item. Doing so signals to all present that school officials recognize the importance time

holds for everyone and that they do not intend to waste it. Yes, it's hard to predict how long each item will take, harder yet to stick to the allotted time. But try it, proponents say. It's courteous, and it keeps the meeting moving along.

Trim the number of items

An agenda with too many items, especially if they're unrelated, may have one of two fates, because it is hard for participants to shift gears. The meeting may adjourn before the agenda is completed or quick, but poor decisions may result. It's also harder for the administration to prepare adequate background information for a packed agenda.

One superintendent's trimming procedure: Choose only one or two major items for each meeting and couple them with less taxing items that nonetheless require board action. "Add a few bits of good news," suggests a colleague from Indiana. In Virginia, another superintendent, concerned that agendas reflect the board's main business, assigns a priority to each monthly item according to predetermined, hierarchical categories of typical agenda items. The most important items make the agenda before those of less rank.

Must content for all items

Each item that makes the final lineup is best accompanied by certain information. Specifically:

- **A recommendation or two**. "I made a recommendation instead of giving several options," says a Missouri superintendent of his worst error in agenda planning. "Agendas prepared with no recommendation at all are the worst," says a North Carolina colleague.
- **Back-up information**. A New York superintendent equates bad agendas with inadequate background information.
- **Nature of item**. For discussion, information, or action? The agenda should make clear the nature of each item.
- **Name of responsible staff member**. A Washington superintendent recalls when a whole list of staff travel requests was questioned by the board, but no administrator present at the meeting was sufficiently briefed to answer questions.
- **Policy and legal references**. "The most appealing idea to me," says Professor Willard Fox, "is the inclusion on the agenda of references to applicable board policy, and state law or regulation. This would ultimately result in more board time spent discussing policy than making procedural decisions."

Guidelines for ordering agenda items

Referring to the most troublesome agenda he had ever seen, one Minnesota superintendent said, "The agenda was a simple list, with the items placed according to the principle of first come, first served". Everyone has ideas about the order in which agenda items should appear. Here they are:

■ **First things first**. Unfortunately, there's no unanimity among superintendents about what should come first. "All action items come first" is the rule of some because it helps reporters meet deadlines and gives the audience the decisions they came to hear.

Others, though, caution that the "action first" rule has, as all rules, some notable exceptions. "Leaving audience recognition until the very last item is very bad if the item is controversial and the audience is stewing," says a Kentucky superintendent. He and others subscribe to the rule that says, "Place urgent items first." But that rule, too, has an exception: "Put items of a controversial nature toward the end of the agenda," advises a Minnesota superintendent, "if you want to be sure to get through all other items on the agenda."

The "action first" rule is also not followed by superintendents who like to separate action items of unequal importance. "Don't mix routine business with vital policy," they say, "or you'll find yourself simultaneously considering which floor polish to use on the gym floor and what educational policy is best for future generations of children."

Another idea as to what should go first: Since creative energy is highest at a meeting's start, put tough issues up front. And the exception: Put tough issues that concern everyone about 15 or 20 minutes into the agenda because that's when attention starts to falter and everyone needs the shot of adrenalin that controversy introduces.

How's that for consensual advice? As Professor Fox advises, every board and superintendent must decide many things about their agenda for themselves, and a rule about what to put first is certainly one of those things.

■ **The meeting middle**. There's also no consensus on what should come second on the agenda. Sure, if all action or urgent business is first, it's easy to figure out what's next: all less urgent discussion or information items.

The many variations on the action-first rule, however, open the way for another thought about how to order what remains after the first item is selected. "Alternate items that unite or divide board members," advises a Wyoming superintendent who sees in that strategy a way to defuse the hostilities that often mount when several explosive issues are considered consecutively. Of course it's hard to predict what's explosive and what's not, as a New York superintendent reminds us. He recalled the time when he planned for the public vote on the budget, which seemed likely to pass, to be first. Then other board business would follow. "The budget was defeated and every other board decision was terrible," he said.

■ **Friendly ending**. There is consensus about what type of item to select

for last place: something with a unifying theme. A report about the achievement of a board goal is an example.

When to schedule executive sessions

Should executive sessions be part of the regular meeting agenda? Retiring to closed session at the beginning or in the middle of a regular meeting is "the single worst error that any board can make," says a New York superintendent. "It excludes the public from what they had expected to be an open and public session." "It just looks suspicious to interrupt a public session for a closed session," says another executive who, like many colleagues, schedules closed sessions to follow most regular meetings.

A California superintendent believes just the opposite, however. He cites the routine scheduling of a 30-minute executive session at the beginning of every meeting as the primary way to keep such sessions short: Everyone's conscious that the public awaits the board.

Guidelines for choosing an agenda style

Besides content, whatever its order, agendas have a second essential ingredient: form and style. As students of aesthetics discovered in ancient times, form is almost inextricably linked to content, and those well versed in the art of agenda building know the same holds true for their monthly masterpieces. That is, the information superintendents and board members want on their agenda often suggests the very form it will take.

What it may not suggest, however, is that the end product should look professional if the board is to look professional. No mimeographed agendas, please, and no typos. General rules about good writing apply to the written agenda. Prose should be clear, concise, and well organized. Also, once the board has a format it likes, it should stick to it. Consistency allows the reader to locate key information quickly — the superintendent's recommendation, for example.

Most agendas fit one, or a combination, of these three basic styles:

- **Simple listing**. The simplest agendas merely list what's going to happen. Little background information is sent in advance; and details are shared right at the board meeting.

Advantage: Administrators don't have all that work preparing written information, nor do board members have mounds of paper to read.

Disadvantage: Board members sometimes do not have enough information to think about issues in advance, ask questions, and get administrators to research further information.

Generally speaking, few school boards use the simple listing agenda, because they believe having background information in advance of board meetings helps board members make the best decisions.

- **Action summaries**. In addition to the simple listing of meeting events, some agenda drafters send board members summaries of the background to each agenda item, along with a recommendation for action. The rec-

ommendation can take the form of a motion the board might adopt if it accepts the superintendent's advice.

Summaries take several forms: The actual agenda is annotated; a separate sheet contains a running commentary discussing all items one after the other; or the summary information on each item appears on a separate page, on a standardized form that presents board members with information about each item in a consistent format.

Advantages: Action summaries save the board from an overwhelming amount of reading and present information in a consistent format.

Disadvantages: Summaries require that much more paperwork for administrators; maybe the board would rather have all the original documentation.

■ **Detailed background**. Board members may, of course, see all the original documentation they require to make informed decisions. Some superintendents send it along with action summaries; some send only the original documentation with the simple agenda listing.

A Minnesota superintendent sends a color-coded packet containing the whole works: a white agenda that merely lists items; green summary sheets with explanations and recommendations; blue sheets with exact wording for board resolutions for each action item; and yellow copies of all original documentation.

Advantages of original documentation: Board members have all relevant information before the meeting and can ask for clarification or more information before the meeting starts.

Disadvantages: Some board members don't want all that paper.

■ **A word about consent agendas**. Any agenda format, consistent with state laws, can incorporate the increasingly popular "consent" segment in order to cut board meeting time.

How consent agendas work: The superintendent groups into one umbrella item all items that normally are routine or have already been discussed and are likely to be acceptable to all members of the board. These items commonly include: approval of minutes; bids; disbursement lists; and even certain personnel actions, such as hiring or tenure decisions. At the meeting, time is saved because only one vote will be required for the umbrella item, rather than a separate vote for each item.

Consent agendas don't preclude discussion or separate consideration of any one item. Before the vote, proper procedure requires the president to call for comment from any member of the board, and allows any board member to remove an item from the consent agenda for separate consideration and adoption.

For samples on all three styles of agendas, sample documentation that supports an agenda item and a consent calendar excerpt, see the Exhibit section of this book.

Setting the Stage

When school officials select the setting for their board meetings, a couple of criteria should spring to mind.

First and foremost: Is the setting conducive to good communication? Communication, after all is what meetings are all about, and the physical set up should not block any ears or eyes from perceiving what's going on. The second selection standard also relates to communication, but it is more subtle. It has nothing to do with making sure everyone can see and hear, but with what everyone will sense at a more subconscious level. It is this: Does the setting create the sense of a school board that acts with dignity, responsibility and authority? Let's apply these two standards to possible meeting rooms.

Choosing a building

Convenience might be the key word when it comes to selecting a building in which to hold the board's regular meeting. If the district has buildings to choose among, pick the one that is nearest to district records or to the population center. Rotating locations, according to research by the National School Boards Association, usually lowers attendance because fewer people find the shifting room, or they think they won't and don't try. Nearby parking facilities, including possible reserved parking for board members, are a must.

Picking a Room

Room size should match group size. People work best, say meeting experts, when they have the impression that a room is full, but not crowded. Because group size cannot always be predicted, two rooms should be available for every board meeting: the one in which the board usually will meet; and the one that will accommodate an anticipated, or unanticipated, large crowd.

It's also helpful to have a room smaller than the board room, located adjacent to or very near the board room, to which the board can retire for its executive sessions. That may be a conference room or office.

Another room selection idea. Pick a room that is not subject to distracting outside noises, one with good acoustics, light, ventilation, independent thermostatic controls, adequate electric outlets. A wall clock helps everyone watch to see that time is well spent. Restroom facilities should be nearby.

A third consideration: Match the meeting room to the meeting purpose. An informal classroom setting might be perfect for a public hearing or work session, when the purpose is to give or receive information on, say, proposed budget cuts. The board room itself, however, is more appropriate for formal meetings and for regular meetings in which public votes are taken.

Arranging the Seating

Of course, everyone must have a seat. But which seating arrangement is most conducive to communication among board members, between board and administration, board and the public, board and media representatives? Communications experts answer that question by saying that seating depends, again, on the meeting's purpose, but also on the board's decision-making and the president's leadership styles. They offer three seating arrangments, some variation of which most school districts use.

- **Circular table**. Picture the board and superintendent sitting around a circular table. Very democratic. No chair, no participant enjoys a spot more equal than any other. Everyone at the table can see and hear well. Off to the side, picture chairs for all observers, tables for the press. The round table might exclude them from the inner circle's discussions if it weren't for that one vacant chair at the table, reserved for the single file parade of people from the staff and audience who will address the board when recognized. The circular table, communications experts say, works well for boards with a democratic decision-making style, for boards with strong presidents who do not have to rely on physical symbols of rank to maintain control. It can help reduce factionalism. (See Exhibit Seven)
- **U-shaped table**. In this setting, the board and superintendent seat themselves around the outside of a big horseshoe. The audience sits in rows facing the open end of the horseshoe table. Of all seating arrangements, this is by far the most popular, and the NSBA publication, *Becoming a Better Board Member*, recommends it.

The symbolism of the arrangement is that the closed board circle has opened to welcome the public and the press. The board president's position at the head of the table is that of leader of not only the board, but of the entire school community.

A disadvantage: Some say that disputes among board members increase with the U-shaped seating arrangement. It's uncomfortable for participants to strain around neighbors to see the board chairman, so they mostly look at and react to the person seated directly across from them. If the two opposites don't attract, hostilities mount.

Meeting planners can conquer the potential problem, however, by dividing conflicting groups or members. As one meeting expert puts it, "Distance will definitely make the hearts of two opposites grow fonder."

- **Theater style**. This arrangement places the board and chief executive behind a fairly straight table, facing the audience, perhaps on a raised platform in a large room to ensure a clear line of sight from the rear. Good for hearings especially, the arrangement symbolizes the board's responsibility to hear public opinion, but maintains the board's distance from the audience and authority over ultimate decisions. Unlike either of the other arrangements, it encourages almost no eye contact, interaction, or

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Note: *Samples of all three seating arrangements are provided in the exhibit section of this book.*

body language among board members. Instead, the contact is between board and audience. A board that uses this seating arrangement, however, should beware of the "we/they" response that the audience may feel if the theater setting is too intimidating and too official.

- **Tools for any room**. Comfortable chairs, but not too comfy. Audio-visual equipment that's not only available, but working. Name plates for board members so the prearranged seating will be preserved. These and other items for stocking the well run board room appear in a checklist in Exhibit Nine.

Rules for any room

Does board policy and room ventilation accommodate smoking? Whatever the rule is, it needs to be clear to all—either through the room's physical arrangement, or by announcement the start of each meeting.

Before the meeting begins, these informal rules of common courtesy also might be established. To minimize the number of disturbances after the meeting begins, only emergency telephone calls should be accepted by anyone present.

- Late-comers should wait outside until there's a break between agenda items.
- All except one door (preferably in rear of room to minimize disruptions) should be blocked to late-comers to help preserve order.

Preparing the Participants

Let's pretend: A great agenda is taking shape; this time, for sure, meeting room arrangements verge on perfection. Now, all that remains is sending out the invitations, a task that is the last bridge, as it were, on the short road we must traverse before each board meeting begins. The key events in notifying and preparing participants are:

Public notification

Any and all are welcome to meetings of the board of education. State law usually prescribes the manner and timing for publishing notifications of each type of meeting. We defer to that source for specifics. Note the sample notice on page 35, however, that the Michigan City, (Ind.) schools placed in their local newspaper, the *News Dispatcher*.

Calendar on Board Agenda

The School Board tomorrow night will consider the new school calendar that would start the 1982-83 school year two weeks earlier.

The plan, presented last month, would start the school year on August 26 and classes on August 30. The year would end June 3. The current calendar starts on September 8 and ends June 13.

The new calendar would permit teachers to enroll in summer classes at area colleges. It also would bring the calendar in line with those of other schools in the area, improving students' chances for employment in the summer.

However, classes would begin before Labor Day, and the time for summer building preparation and bus repairs would be shortened.

In a survey of 412 teachers, 189 favored the plan.

Also, Superintendent Charles Abraham is expected to present high school attendance reports from the 1981-82 school year.

Tomorrow's meeting is being moved to the Elston High School auditorium because a large crowd is expected.

After the regular meeting, the board will move to the Administration Building for a closed-door session to discuss personnel.

Personal invitations

It goes almost without saying that board members deserve personal reminders of meetings. They, after all, fall into the number one category of who gets invitations: those whose presence is needed to make decisions.

Who else should make the guest list? Only those people who will help the meeting or whom the meeting will help. That's one idea, which also can be phrased this way: Only those who will be directly affected by what transpires (eg.: the staff who will be affected by proposed changes in personnel policies, for example), or those with information to give (such as the personnel director who will present the proposed policy changes).

Beyond these people, it sometimes is helpful to invite certain people for appearances sake, if their presence, because of their community position, might give broader public sanction to board action, or produce wider public participation. An example is the head of the League of Women Voters.

Experts warn not to ask people merely because of their status, however. Principals usually don't have to come to every meeting, for instance, just for form's sake, to confirm their spot on the administrative team. They have enough meetings to attend.

Do invite the opposition to any measure recommended for approval. As one widely quoted expert says, real opposition is one part disagreement, and nine parts resentment at not being consulted.

Other people, with jobs to do at meetings, need personal notification, too: the news media, the attorney, substitutes for the board secretary or

key administrators who are absent, ushers (if a crowd is anticipated), and security and maintenance staff.

Advance agendas

The media will generally alert the community at large of upcoming meetings. So agenda items should be in the hands of the media in time to make deadlines. Sending agendas in advance of meetings helps participants marshal their thoughts — a sure-fire way to cut the fat from verbal board room battles. The practice, say most superintendents, is one of their primary strategies for reducing meeting time. To save money, full agendas often are sent only to key participants. Abbreviated versions are usually sufficient to alert the news media, most staff, and the public to events of interest to them. The agendas are mailed or delivered somewhere from two to five days before the meeting. That's about enough time for participants "to do their homework," but not enough time for them "to lose the packets."

Last minute details, signals

Most board members do their homework, read their packets, and call with questions or requests for more information. Some, though, need prompting. Calling each board member the morning of the meeting is a courtesy, in any case, and a perfectly polite time to inquire whether the agenda was clear. Other busy participants may need a call to ensure that the board meeting is still on their schedule.

The time is now, too, for any last minute preparation for the agenda. Have the board president and the superintendent accurately anticipated how the meeting will go? Have they prepared not only for what they expect to happen, but for the unexpected, too? We hope so, because, in the next chapter, the board meeting begins.

CHAPTER TWO

Performing: The school board in action

Look in with us now, as doors open for a regular meeting of the local school board. Statistically, one board meeting will look much like others in board rooms across the nation. The typical board, according to NSBA research, conducts one (sometimes two) regular meeting(s) each month, in the same location, in the evening hours, for approximately three to four hours. Administrators arrange seating for an average of five to ten speakers, but have a contingency plan for more people should they appear.

Besides statistical similarity, board meetings share two other common traits. First, they often reflect, in microcosmic fashion, the way the school officials and entire school community look at education. In the community that takes its schools seriously, board meetings show it.

Long- and short-range plans, encouraged by — indeed, demanded in return for — community support, have helped the public board meeting shake the persistent image of "the dullest show in town." This show was once depicted in *How a School Board Operates*, by author and former Connecticut school board member Ben Brodinsky, as the show that lasts past midnight, ends "with the chairman losing the gavel, then a watch, then the agenda, and finally the entire board's losing its reason for being around the table."

Another common trait: Despite the best laid plans, board meetings often stray from the course developed by the chief meeting planners. School officials should not be discouraged, however. Waylaid plans are a function of human dynamics, a symptom of human energies unleashed.

A major goal of this chapter is to help meeting planners and participants to channel their energies most productively. To do so requires that everyone involved in a school board meeting understand each other's role, and what it takes for each person involved to perform well.

Enter, the Board Chairperson

"Meeting leaders are not born, they are made," says meeting expert B. Y. Auger. Before experience and training, no person has all the traits on anybody's list of what makes an ideal meeting leader, says Auger. He advises that any group — including school boards — concentrate on improving the leadership they've got.

With much the same spirit, we look now at the meeting chairman's job, and at the personal and leadership traits this key person can cultivate to do the job better.

The job

State laws usually say very little about running school board meetings, other than the fact that the board president should do it, or the vice-president in the president's absence.

The superintendent, in other words, steps into the background when meeting plans are complete; the board chairman moves forward to assume control. The success of the meeting will depend about equally on good preparation and, as a Texas board member puts it, whether the meeting's leader can "keep control of the meeting." Others call the knack, "managing human energy."

The first test of that ability comes as the president gavels the meeting to order. Does the president establish a proper pace and tone when the meeting starts? Does the meeting start on time, showing everyone that time is important, disregarding chronic late-comers even if they are key to the agenda? Are opening remarks friendly?

The person

From the moment of that first appearance, the meeting chairman is in the spotlight. The chair's behavior will be a guide to the kind of behavior that's desired or that will be tolerated in others, so it had better be exemplary.

Sure everyone has off days and, somewhere in this country, superintendents and board members have witnessed their presidents argue, lose their tempers, publicly condemn schools, openly criticize staff, berate parents for not doing **their** duty, and adjourn meetings in anger. Say those who have witnessed too much: "Exhibiting such behavior leads to far worse board meetings than not exhibiting almost any other meeting management skill." Their composite picture of the best presidents they've ever worked with reveals these personal traits:

- **Knows audience, speaks their language**. The good president

"understands the community," says a Michigan board member. A good president shares the audience's sincere interest in public welfare, adds a New York superintendent. "No jargon," says another.

- **Prepares well in advance**. "Well informed," "does homework," and "takes responsibilities seriously" are descriptions other school leaders apply to their best presidents.
- **Speaks well**. A Wisconsin superintendent praises her president for being "a good speaker, articulate."
- **Willingly opens up discussion**. A good leader does not "seek to become a hero at everyone else's expense," says one long-time Pennsylvania board member. The contributions of other board members are sought by, and do not threaten, the good leader. An effective president is "pleased to delegate responsibilities to other board members," a colleague says.
- **Maintains personal control**. No distracting mannerisms is on B. Y. Auger's list of preferred traits. He likes firm, well-modulated voices, too. "Business-like and compassionate" describes the leader favored by a Texas superintendent. A whole string of descriptive phrases comes from colleagues: "Always in charge," "always keeps cool," "always calm," "totally open and honest," "always courteous," "never loses a sense of humor." Adds a California superintendent: "People who are very successful in their vocation and have a stable home environment" are more likely to maintain control of meetings.

The leader

"Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something that you want done because that someone else wants to do it," the famous saying goes. The statement describes one of the two most practiced leadership styles, the facilitator. Other management experts call the style creative leadership, participatory decision making, or catalytic behavior.

The leader who chooses this style sees a leader "as servant of the group rather than as its master," says *Harvard Business Review* contributor Antony Jay. A Minnesota superintendent prefers the style, saying: "A low-key person is better than one who dominates and uses authority."

A good leader is right in tune with the times. Facilitating is the style of the 1980s, as management ranks open to broader segments of society, and those at the top realize that all heads are better than one.

Leaders also can opt for the "it's lonely at the top" style, and "use sledgehammer tactics to drive points home," as Auger puts it. The autocratic style does get results, but has been known to sacrifice the team spirit.

- **Choosing a style**. Pushing or pulling participants through the board meeting is not the only choice a board president has. Management experts draw a graph showing a continuum of styles that begins with a participative style and ends with an autocratic style, and charts many gradations in between.

Some advise meeting leaders to pick one style that fits them personally

and to stick to it, so other people won't get confused about their roles. Others, like Barry Maude in *Managing Meetings*, suggest that leaders change styles as needed to accommodate the pressures of time or a change in the nature of the problem. Says Maude of the effective leader:

"An effective leader sizes up the situation, decides what kind of leadership is required, then slips into the appropriate gear. So in one meeting, a leader is a nonassertive idea-eunuch; in the next, a tough, fast-talking overlord."

"Today an effective leader is a suction-pump drawing out people's ideas; tomorrow, a conveyor belt, feeding the group with information, carrying them steadily and efficiently toward a decision. The day after, the effective leader becomes a spark-plug, showering the meeting with ideas. By discrete use of the loud and soft pedals, a leader becomes effective for all meetings."

However the board president defines his or her role, the style will be "as unique as a fingerprint," says a Pennsylvania School Boards Association *Bulletin* (1974).

■ **Applying style to task goals**. "Keeping the members on task" is the mark of a leader whose style works, according to a Minnesota superintendent. Likewise, "an inability to move the meeting to any decision" is a sure clue that leadership is lacking, says a Michigan colleague. Here are some things that can be done to keep members "on task":

— *Ask members to approve the agenda*, with any changes, before the meeting starts so that all will agree about the meeting's goals.
— *Stimulate discussion* on each item by announcing the topic and asking questions of the group.
— *Balance discussions* by knowing the topic, promoting participation among all members, interrupting monopolizers, and encouraging timid members.
— *Avoid digressions and redundancies* by telling people they are "off the topic," summarizing main points, and asking members if they're ready to vote.
— *Stick to the agenda* by making and sticking to the time limits for each item, sacrificing small points for key issues.
— *Reach conclusions on each agenda item* by recognizing when enough discussion has occurred, calling for a vote, restating what the decision is, and assigning responsibilities.

Applying style to process goals

In an ideal world, everyone in the school community would work without self-interest for the common good of the public schools. In reality, every individual — even the most service-minded school official — has some difficulty reconciling personal and community goals. "What we go through for so few rewards," board members might justifiably, but rarely, complain.

Good leaders have a sixth sense about how to maintain the group

identity, even while members question whether the rewards of group membership satisfy personal expectations. They do these things:

— *Break up controversy* by refocusing on ideas, students, or policy instead of people; calling for a recess: telling a joke; negotiating as a third party in an argument, not taking sides; proclaiming ideas "group property" so egos aren't hurt when ideas are critiqued. **Caution**: Discouraging every spirited conversation may dampen the creativity confrontation produces.

— *Involve everyone* so that timid members don't become dead weight by virtue of the fact that "they had no say."

Next, the Board Officers

There's nothing special, really, to say about the duties of board officers at board meetings, except to make this important point: Board officers are governed by the same general rules as other board members. For example, except when the vice-president is serving as chairperson the vice-president is just another board member.

Actually, there's a second point to make. All officers should try to go that extra mile to help the chairperson maintain the pace and tone of a meeting once it is set, and to exhibit exemplary behavior.

Other Board Members

Like board president leadership styles, there are as many styles of boardsmanship as there are board members, and no one way is best. That didn't stop us, though, from cataloguing typical board member traits, and producing the following directory of participation skills, individual boardsmanship styles, and team decision-making styles.

Participation Skills

The idea is "to be part of the solution, not part of the problem," a New York superintendent says, describing his basic philosophy of effective boardsmanship. Here are more ideas from other school executives, board members, and management experts:

Do homework

Being prepared for board deliberations requires more than one reading of the agenda. "Good board members take time to understand the issues," advises an Illinois board president. "They have thought through all possible sides of an issue before formal discussions begin," says an Iowa peer. From another executive: "When they have questions about the agenda, they call me before the board meeting."

Put team first

Individuals get more out of group membership when they can identify their self-interests with the group's interest. For board members, this means putting the board's interest in all children before personal concern for ONLY one type of child, one age-group, one program, one school.

"Think Group," management experts advise. Don't surprise the group with a personal agenda. Deputize yourself to help the chairperson police agenda time limits, break up disputes over rules of procedure, and keep the group on task.

Listen with an open mind

"Willing to listen" and "they don't make snap decisions" are two frequent descriptions superintendents give their best board members. "After they listen to what has been said, they act in the best interests of the children," a Texas superintendent adds. Management experts point out that one sign of "a would-rather-talk-than-listen person" is when that person verbally tries to anticipate what others will say. "State your own mind only," the experts say.

Display good manners

No paper shuffling, no side conversations. "Facial expressions, disinterest, or impoliteness" are the pet peeves of an Alaska superintendent. Says a board member, "Respect for others is my golden rule."

Discuss issues

"Good board members," says a Utah board president, "do not take time on irrelevant issues." "They clearly make their point, but briefly," adds a Michigan executive. Effective board members do not repeat themselves, digress, reminisce, or needlessly provoke controversy.

Vote conscience, accept majority

That's what we advise. See page 44 for a discussion on whether split votes help or harm the board.

Boardmanship Styles

People like to satirize school board members, perhaps because the media give the widest coverage to school board meetings at which outlandish or controversial things happen.

The diligent team member does not make good copy — except in **this** book! From the literature and superintendent testimony, here are some of the categories that describe board members:

The facilitator

This board member helps the chairperson reach process goals and keep the team thinking **Group**, and observes the rules of full and fair discussion. Most board members fall into this and the following category.

The task master

This member has "a good sense of direction" when it comes to helping the chairperson get through the agenda, as a California superintendent says. A task master "keeps the board concentrating on the items on the agenda," says a Utah superintendent.

The nonparticipant

This rare member may just be timid, or may be unprepared or inattentive unless helped by the chairperson and facilitating board members. A nonparticipant may believe a lay person's view cannot possibly be better than the superintendent's, and defer all action to the chief executive.

The show stealer

Every now and then, we see a board member who fits the following epitaphs: "Plays to the press," "takes a stand, then 'speechifies' to hear his or her own voice," "grandstands," and "rushes to the press table to 'clarify' the real truth as opposed to what was reported by staff."

The disrupter

Occasionally, an unmannerly board member appears, someone who "defames other board members publicly," "raises his voice to the audience," and "loses his temper, shouts, and uses bad language."

The politician

"Board members that conduct political rallies during the meeting are the worst," a California superintendent complains. At least one other superintendent, in Washington, has attended such a meeting. The superintendent recalls a member who was running for another public office and suddenly started voting the party line on school issues so that voters would see a consistent platform.

The ax grinder

The one-issue board member wins this label. Such a board member may be the one who prefers always to keep costs down, regardless of what happens to students.

Team Decision-making Styles

Five percent of all school boards rubber stamp their chief executive's recommendations, according to NSBA's latest research on school board decision-making styles (1976). At the other extreme are the seven percent who actively ignore their superintendent and try to administer the schools themselves.

The majority of school boards (88 percent) work with their superintendents to solve whatever is on the board's agenda. In greater detail, the main methods used to reach decisions are:

Consensus-building

Most boards use this method, whereby members view themselves as peers, regard their superintendent as a source of information and advice, and discuss issues in depth. Frequently, consensus-building results in a consensus on a vote. Votes may be split but according to conscience and not to long-running board member disputes; and everyone supports the majority decision. The board tries to live the textbook ideal of the policy-making board and the administering superintendent.

Faction-weary

These boards like to administer, and often get involved in daily operations through board committees responsible for overseeing various aspects of school operations. The administration is not especially trusted, and the board-superintendent line is unclear. At meetings of the full board, discussions are often heated. When the vote comes, it's often split, with the same people on the same side every time.

Rubber stamping

These boards view themselves more as a benign corporate board than as an active legislative body. They defer to their professional administrator, or perhaps to one powerful member whose charismatic qualities inspire the faith of the follower. However, some administrators are able to get "a sense of the board" and frame issues and recommendations in a way that they are, indeed, acceptable to the board.

A word about split votes

The jury's still out on whether split votes harm the public's perceptions of the board, and or the board's own view of itself as a team.

Conventional wisdom okays a dissent vote on issues, but demands support of the majority decision. The only two studies of the issue, reported by NSBA in 1976, found opposite thinking among superintendents and board members.

The first study, conducted by Jack J. Salisbury, looked at how boards in 116 California districts voted. Salisbury, who believed the media unfairly focus on issues that divide the board, talked only to administrators. Sev-

enty-one percent of these administrators believed a split vote does not harm board members' ability to work together. From superintendents, Salisbury heard that:

- Boards divided on only 7.4 percent of their votes (one out of every 14 votes).
- One-third believed their board members never aligned the same way twice.
- One-third believed that board factions always aligned the same way.
- Most believed no dissenting board member would vote with the majority just to make a vote unanimous, but would support the majority decision.

In contrast, when NSBA asked board members about voting patterns:

- 39 percent said their board usually split over important issues.
- 28 percent said the board usually reached consensus on important issues and voted unanimously.
- 29 percent said that, on important issues, dissenting members voiced their disagreement, but voted with the board to make a unanimous showing.
- 4 percent said their board split, on whatever the issue, because of long-running disagreements on the board.

The Superintendent

The superintendent who "loses focus of an appropriate role" can ruin a board meeting, says a Michigan board member.

Here are examples of lost focuses, shared by frank superintendents and board members:

- "Not allowing the board president to run the meeting."
- "Not being adequately prepared to make recommendations."
- "Not telling the board the whole truth (and getting caught)."
- "Not keeping my temper, insulting the board, and walking out the door."

Take away the "not's" from those comments and a large part of the superintendent's role is defined.

But there's more. Many boards, for instance, have already figured out that superintendents are wonderful secretaries, careful to make accurate records of proceedings because they must be accountable for following up on all meeting action. This task fits many a superintendent's own image at a meeting. "I try to play a low-key role on most issues," says one.

A Colorado board member approves most of superintendents who "are able to speak or be quiet as needed." The board member hints at this reality: Even as they're quietly taking notes, many superintendents wear their trouble-shooter hats, poised and ready to help with conflict if the board chairman needs help.

The California School Boards Association (CSBA) has another list of attitudes and behaviors boards might expect of their superintendents in a meeting. According to the CSBA *Board Presidents' Handbook*, board members might suggest to their administrator:

- Please, superintendents, direct comments to all board members, not just your favorite few.
- We'd just as soon not see you grimace when you disagree with the board.
- You're welcome, expected actually, to come to every meeting.
- Our criticism is meant to be constructive, so don't take it personally.
- We like energetic presentations of your recommendations, so we know you have faith in what you say.
- Don't worry if we board members differ in our values.
- Please take a stand on controversial issues.

Other Staff Members

There are basically two ways staff members other than the superintendent participate in board meetings: formally and informally.

In most districts, especially when a management team is operating, staff members formally participate in board meetings by providing information to the board that relates to programs or areas for which they are responsible.

Although many staff members are asked by the superintendent to participate in board meetings on an *ad hoc* basis — only when there is a topic on the agenda that relates directly to their work, some districts require certain staff members always to be present at board meetings to field questions that relate to their area of expertise. These staff members include the school finance or business administrator, director of instruction, the school personnel director, and the school attorney. The school public relations or public information officer nearly always attends board meetings to assist reporters in getting the information they need, and to view board deliberations first-hand in order to be better able to communicate about board proceedings, both in oral reports and in publications. The public relations administrator might also provide periodic advice on improving board communcation.

Because all staff members are responsible to the superintendent, all board requests for information from the staff should go through the superintendent. The superintendent knows best who should speak on what, who he wants to speak on what, and who is properly prepared to speak on an issue.

Staff members informally participate in board meetings, just as any citizen in the school community might. Staff members especially are interested in broad deliberations and decisions that affect them.

In a number of districts, those that have employee group or bargaining associations, staff members do not address the board directly except through their group representative. Boards usually allow these representatives to provide information, but do not allow open debate of issues on the bargaining table, or the *ad hoc* airing of grievances that should be handled through established procedures.

The People in the Audience

People come to school board meetings for three reasons, according to 1980 NSBA research. They come because they have a personal interest in one agenda item, the controversy surrounding an item intrigues them, and because they believe "real" school decisions are made in meetings.

Given the opportunity to address the board, the audience grabs the chance on only one-quarter of all agenda items. They leave the board room feeling that, despite board interest in public comment, board meetings remain in the province of officialdom.

That's a rather discouraging conclusion for most citizens, and perhaps the reason, as the NSBA research suggests, that individuals concerned about one agenda item might try to engineer sufficiently large attendance to convince the board that the entire community is interested in their cause. Board members must realize that a room full of people does not necessarily represent the "will of the whole community" or good education for all students.

Serving as a safety valve for letting off steam, however, is as legitimate a reason for conducting a meeting as any other. Let's look at how to handle controversy productively.

Anticipated Controversy on Agenda Items

"These days, many things are controversial — even supposedly non-controversial items," laments a superintendent.

From across the country, school leaders report that public controversy should be anticipated when these items are on the agenda:

- Closing, redistricting, or desegregating schools.
- Introducing courses on human sexuality or ethics.
- Cutting programs — especially if teachers, but not administrators, lose jobs.
- Cutting staff, settling strikes, or shifting staff among schools.
- Raising local taxes.

Here are some tips on how to plan for the inevitable:

With pre-established procedures

If the board does not have a set procedure for hearing public comment, it is up to the superintendent to recommend one. Recommended elements of that procedure include:

- "Listen to comments from the public, but do not attempt to make decisions 'on the spot,' when the issue is first raised, advises an Illinois superintendent. This means, to other superintendents, that potentially controversial items should first be introduced as staff reports. Action should await a second meeting, when all the facts are in and the superintendent can make a recommendation."
- "Be sure to require any large group to have a spokesperson, and require

board members to address that person only," says a Missouri board president. In similar fashion, "require citizens to address the board chairperson," a Michigan superintendent advises. A Michigan colleague advises simply to "accept remarks as information and refrain from answering." The idea is not to get into lengthy debates or dialogue between board members and the audience.

- "Include time limits and any rules you want about the order of speakers," a Virginia executive cautions. To order speakers, the board must know who plans to speak, so ask each person to sign in, please, stating his or her name and giving a summary of views. Delegations that want to present petitions should be asked to submit them to the superintendent in advance of the meeting.
- "Be willing to have more meetings," says a New Mexico administrator; or make sure the board has all the information it needs by postponing decisions until *ad hoc* committees research the topic, or pollsters survey the community. "Be sure to set a specific reporting date" for this additional information to come back to the board, says a Midwestern superintendent. Say others: Make sure board policy requires all reports to go through administrative channels so they come to the board with a recommendation.

With background

Immediately before the meeting, "be sure the board has timely and appropriate information" about the controversy, advises a New York superintendent.

With room set-up

"Arrange the physical setting to give the board control," a Minnesota administrator says.

At the meeting

"Have a strong president, someone who will be fair to both sides, but know when to shut off debate," an Iowa superintendent says. The chairman's first job is "to clearly state the problem and clearly define procedures for commenting before anyone is recognized to speak," says a Virginia board leader. The president and all board members should: "Watch their listening posture" and "keep the idea of what is best for students uppermost in their minds," others warn.

Unanticipated Controversy on Agenda Items

One board was to consider no longer providing transportation for any students except those that the state law required the board to bus. Another planned to recognize student achievement according to traditional practices, not written policy. Yet a third had on its agenda "hiring the new football coach." Unanticipated large crowds appeared in all three cases.

With no plan to handle the unexpected, each of these boards, respectively:

- Was forced to adjourn before other business was completed.
- Finished all business, but the meeting lasted all night.
- Completed all business within the allotted time, but the controversy took away so much discussion time from remaining agenda items that poor decisions were made.

In yet another district, the board, hoping to put out quickly the flames of controversy, made an ill-advised commitment that later had to be reversed.

There are a number of ways school leaders can deal with unanticipated controversy on agenda items. One is to conduct a partial or full public hearing at the very meeting during which unanticipated controversy arises. Board presidents will have to "play it by ear" and "use their imagination" to assess whether there's need and time for a hearing. One South Carolina superintendent advises "Hear at least the spokesman for each viewpoint, but limit speaking time so that scheduled business can be completed."

That idea and this one are not necessarily mutually exclusive: "Hold the item for the next meeting," as a Wisconsin superintendent suggests. Tabling the item, and appointing a committee to study it, will ensure the board that it has the facts and the presence of all relevant parties when it finally makes its decisions, an Illinois colleague says.

Unanticipated Controversy on Nonagenda Items

"If nonagenda items are a problem, a more structured approach is required," a Virginia president advises. Public complaints — especially about personnel — can trip up the unprepared board. On less volatile subjects, the board — without a set procedure for handling nonagenda items — might "take action ahead of the scheduled time" as a board member in the Southwest has seen. It also might take a stand without adequate background and recommendations from staff. In any case, controversial, nonagenda items can lead to:

- Public perception of incompetence.
- Loss of control, chaos, anxiety, and frustration.
- And all those negative outcomes listed above for meetings that let unanticipated controversy on agenda items get out of hand.

The advice from school leaders on handling nonagenda items includes all possibilities:

Don't allow them at all

"Remind people that they must follow the board's policy for placing items on the agenda," many advise. Echoes a Nebraska superintendent: "Stick to the agenda."

Allow if appropriate

Whether raised by board members or the audience; "It's best to keep nonagenda items off, but the president may allow those items that should or must be handled by the board," a New York superintendent advises.

"Our first agenda item is approval of the agenda," says a Texas board member. "After that, nothing is added."

"If an 'added' item has the potential for distraction," cautions another superintendent, "the president need only summarize the main points and state that action will be deferred to the next meeting when the superintendent can make a specific recommendation." Others allow nonagenda items, but clearly state that no action will be taken and that public comment may consume only so many minutes.

The strategy in a New York district: "We hold all nonagenda items until the end of the meeting when most people want to leave." In another: "We discuss nonagenda items informally after the regular meeting is adjourned. If they're appropriate, we put them on the agenda for the next meeting."

Welcome, Community Residents

"Hey, great! I'm expected! Better yet, I'm welcome."

Wouldn't it be fine if those thoughts passed through the minds of all citizens who walked into the board's meeting room. They will if:

- A staff or board member meets them at the door, points out coatracks, proper seating, restrooms, and whatever other small details make people feel at ease.
- Packets of information also welcome each person, telling him or her in writing what tonight's agenda is, how the board proceeds with its business, how the board welcomes public comment, and what the proper channels for addressing the board are.
- The agenda itself has been planned with the audience in mind, with business details streamlined into a consent agenda, and with the majority of meeting time planned for crucial policy work.

CHAPTER THREE

Following up: The superintendent's communications

"Communication, communication, and communication," says a midwestern superintendent when asked what he considers to be the three most essential tasks a superintendent must complete when the board meeting has adjourned.

"Leave the meeting with a list of things to do," an Ohio superintendent says.

Others agree, but sheepishly admit that they learned the lesson after failing to do follow-up homework:

- "I forgot to follow up on a board promise to citizens that an item would appear on a future agenda," says a Michigan superintendent.
- "I was unable to inform an employee of a personnel decision before that employee heard about the board's action on television," a Texas administrator recalls.
- "I didn't write down a board member's request for information, so it slipped my mind," admits an Iowa superintendent.
- "I remembered that the board had asked me to write letters to state legislators the very minute the board president asked me for copies of the correspondence," another chagrined administrator says.
- "I couldn't get together a quorum of the board on short notice on the evening of the high school graduation ceremony," an Alaskan executive says of the time he forgot to ask the board at an earlier, regular meeting

whether it would waive certain graduation requirements for a senior high student. "I took the chance the board would back me and waived the policy," he says. Fortunately, the board did.

These are the lessons experiences like these have taught:

Notify individuals affected by board action

A telephone call or personal letter should be standard operating procedure when it comes to telling individuals of board action that affects them.

Which actions require followup is a judgment call on the part of the superintendent. If the individual who is affected was present at the meeting, a letter confirming action may follow. If not, and the action, for instance, adversely affects a staff person's livelihood, someone should telephone the messages before the bad news arrives via the grapevine or the late night news reports, if possible. Some meetings are covered "live."

If board action was deferred, be sure to follow up somehow. Individuals are much more willing to accept deferrals when administrators themselves follow through on a matter, if appropriate, or bring the matter back to the board. Any memos sent to staff or board members should be tactful, brief, and to the point.

Getting Better Coverage

Want better media coverage of board meetings? Try these ideas from several school districts:

Long before any meeting:

- Adopt policy encouraging ongoing, open, and honest media relations during and between board meetings.
- If board policy allows, check to see whether local cable television stations might want to carry the meeting as a public service.
- Invite press to an annual dinner to encourage informal communication.

Before each meeting:

- Send agendas to reporters along with special invitations to attend. Invitations should include the name — and day and evening telephone numbers — of a district spokesperson who will be available before, during, and after the meeting for any reporter's questions.
- Ensure that the board room set-up includes well-lighted tables and other special accommodations, as needed, for local media representatives.
- On the morning of the meeting, call local radio and television stations and ask that, as a public service, they announce the meeting, report highlights of the agenda, and invite people to come and participate.

Following each meeting:

- Distribute news releases or "board reports "that reflect actual outcomes. Some background releases might be prepared in advance to clarify certain issues.
- Tape, in time for the evening news, a couple of television or radio reports of board meeting results.

Help news media with reports

Some school districts prepare press releases themselves in order to be sure that accurate reports of board action are available to the news media. In others, school officials (or a board-appointed spokesperson) stand by following the meeting to answer any questions reporters might have.

Elsewhere, superintendents "work with the press to ensure accuracy" of reporting, as a New York superintendent puts it. This usually equates to providing sufficient background information about an issue.

Prepare informal bulletins for staff

Beyond notifications to individual staff members affected by board action, staff in general want to know, and have a right to know, what action their employer has taken that may affect how the school system operates. A regular staff bulletin accomplishes that task with ease, and sends this message between the lines: The board appreciates staff interest in school governance issues. To see how one school system prepares its staff bulletin, see Exhibit Thirteen.

Write a newsletter for the community

Many school districts prepare a special report of board action that is published the day immediately following a board meeting, and sent to key, if not all, members of the school community.

In some districts, a few paragraphs about recent board action is inserted in the next newsletter the district sends home to residents. In still other districts, notes about board action are included in the newsletters individual schools send home with students to parents.

Again, such reports serve two communication purposes: The facts of the meeting get out where they're wanted; and the fact that the schools initiate this communication tells people the district understands communication is important.

Follow up on board directives and individual board member requests

The superintendent has no choice but to carry out board directives. And, of course, immediate responses to board member questions or requests for information make for good board-superintendent relations. Interim reports to the board between meetings also let the board know the superintendent is on the job and following an issue of concern to the board.

Prepare, distribute the minutes

Once, two weeks after a meeting of a psychological society, meeting experts conducted a memory retention study. The findings, reported by B. Y. Auger: The average attendee recalled only 8.4 percent of all points considered, and 42 percent of those recollections were inaccurate.

This study suggests that, if the "approval of the minutes" item on the next month's agenda is to have any meaning at all, the minutes of each

school board meeting should be written up and sent out to board members within a day, or as quickly as possible, after the meeting.

Evaluate how the meeting went

"I try to pick up on side comments," says one superintendent, explaining one kind of evaluation technique he applies to each board meeting. Another superintendent asks this question: "Why did the meeting progress the way it did, for better or worse?" she thoughtfully asks herself as she mentally reviews board room scenes.

Informal evaluation of each board meeting by the superintendent may be desirable, but it should not be the only kind of evaluation that is undertaken.

In some districts, board policy directs that those who plan each meeting do a post-mortem on the board's proceedings. In one California district, the superintendent "reviews each administrator's portion of each meeting with him or her."

Many types of checklists have been published to help planners, participants, and observers formally assess what transpired at a board meeting. Was preparation adequate? The decision-making process smooth? The leadership effective? We've amalgamated all forms, plus all the points raised in this book, into one comprehensive scorecard, which appears as Exhibit Fifteen.

How to use the data

Once the responses to the "School Board Meeting Evaluation Checklist" have been tabulated, the board and administrative team can meet in an informal work session to discuss a few problems that present themselves.

Another way to board self-assessment is for the superintendent to give the board a list of items that typically appear on agendas over, say, a one-year period. Members would rank each, giving the number 1 to the topic of greatest importance to the board. The superintendent would then record how much meeting time the board actually spends on each item over the course of several meetings. Discussing the difference between word and action can lead to needed improvements in meeting procedures.

Board self evaluations, if developed with board-superintendent participation, can help determine if a board is living up to performance expectations for itself.

One word of caution is due here: self-evaluations may open a can of emotional worms if board member relations are especially delicate, or relations between the board and superintendent are less than courteous and respectful. In that case, a neutral outsider often can keep the lid on emotions by using checklists and other means to focus discussion on issues rather than on personalities.

Finally, start planning the next meeting

While tabled items are "still fresh in mind," research them for the next meeting, a Missouri superintendent advises. "Open a folder and drop in a list of every nonagenda item someone wanted to add to this meeting, but the board deferred until the next," a colleague adds. Another advises that each month's agenda be searched for items that might belong on the annual meeting calendar.

All three superintendents are among a long list of superintendents and board members who see the end of one board meeting as the beginning of the next, and who execute each follow-up task with an eye toward improving the district's entire long- and short-range planning process for future school board meetings.

In Summary

School board meetings, the primary vehicle for interaction between school officials and the school community, can indeed be a showcase for educational leadership. Meeting planners and participants need only heed a few basic rules about effective management of meetings.

- **Before each meeting**. First, build a solid foundation for all meetings by clarifying in advance the board's role and the superintendent's. Establish groundrules for decision making in the form of procedural bylaws and keep current the school district's manual of policies and regulations. Then, for each meeting, make sure the agenda is developed with proper attention to content, sequence, and style. Make sure the board's meeting room is conducive to communications, and that participants are prepared to act on agenda matters.
- **At each meeting**. Be sure participants know what is expected of them and have agreed upon such rules of conduct as being prepared, willing to listen, and focusing on issues.
- **After each meeting**. Communicate board action to all interested parties, and evaluate the effectiveness with which the board acted. Then use all this information as the whole process begins again, as plans for the next meeting — both long- and short-range — take place.

With practiced attention to these rules, the public school board meeting will continue its tradition as a truly democratic, uniquely American event.

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EXHIBITS

Many of the exhibits in this section come directly from local school districts. In some cases, they have been edited or modified slightly for clarity or to reflect the style and content of this book.

EXHIBIT ONE

Parliamentary Rules at a Glance

School boards may adopt any procedural rules they want, as long as they follow pertinent state law and what we might call first principles of parliamentary order.

These principles are listed below: Included is a list of suggested rules of order derived from these principles, modified slightly from standard rules of parliamentarians. These modifications simplify procedures for smaller school boards, and boards should feel free to modify them further to fit state law and local custom.

First principles

It's best if these four principles underlie rules of order no matter how simple or complex the rules are:

1. **Majority rules.** This principle has several components, starting with the notion that school board members alone have no legal power. The board, then, must act as a body for its decision to be binding. And, except in those areas specified by state law, the board is bound by the decisions of the majority. Just because the majority rules, however, the majority is not always and forever correct. As we know, today's minority often holds tomorrow's prevailing view.

The majority rule principle is first one of practicality, since meeting time is too precious to allow every debate to run on until consensus is reached. However, the closer a board can come to consensus the better. It also is a way to strengthen and preserve the board's group identity because the minority is bound to support the majority's action.

2. **Equal opportunity decision making.** All board members, according to this second principle, should have an equal chance to speak to the issue before the board.

This principle protects minority rights in several ways. A minority of just one person may ask for a complex motion to be considered paragraph by paragraph. *Robert's Rules* further defends board minorities (defined as one third plus one) by empowering them to overrule certain procedural motions that Robert's otherwise declares undebatable. (The rules included in this exhibit are all debatable, but a majority must approve them, a system that seems less complex for small boards.)

3. **Decisions based on merit.** The third principle states that a board's action should be based entirely on merit — not on manipulation of procedural rules. Deliberation should focus on issues, not people.

4. **Efficient proceedings.** The first three principles are part of this fourth, which is augmented by these ideas:

- Discussions should be orderly, with no board member randomly or spontaneously interrupting another who has the floor.

- Board members should proceed as though time is of the essence, wandering neither to left nor right in personal reminiscences or redundancies.
- Board members should know their rules of procedure and the principles behind them.

Rules of order

Rules of order can be divided into three groups: **general rules** about how board meetings should proceed; special rules that apply to what we'll call **substantive motions** (*Robert's Rules* calls them main or principal motions) — that is, motions pertaining to issues; and **procedural motions** — that is, motions about . . . well . . . making motions.

- **General rules of order**. These rules govern motions that are either substantive or procedural:

—***Presiding officer***. The board president presides, recognizes board members before they may speak, may rule on what is in order, may rule on whether a speaker has exceeded the bounds of courtesy, may respond to questions about rules or order, may call a brief recess at any time, and may adjourn in an emergency.

—***Who presides if the president debates***? Because it gives one side an unfair advantage if the presiding officer actively advocates his position, the presiding officer should designate another board member to assume the presiding role if the chairman chooses to become actively engaged in debate.

—***Board action by motion***. The board must proceed by motion. Most boards consider "seconds" to be necessary because they do not want to take time to consider something that fewer than two people deem important. Any board member, even the chairman, may make a motion. Although *Robert's Rules* says a motion, once made, may not be withdrawn without approval of the entire assembly, small school boards may want to allow the person introducing the motion to withdraw it anytime before a vote is called for.

—***Debate***. After a motion is made, but before a vote is taken, the chair may open the floor to debate and preside over it by rules such as these:

- The member who makes the motion may speak first.
- Next, those who have not yet spoken may do so before anyone will be recognized to make a second remark.
- The chairman may want to give the floor alternately to board members who wish to speak for or against the motion.

Substantive motions

In addition to the general rules listed previously, substantive motions may also be guided by these rules:

—***One motion at a time***. One board member may make only one motion at a time.

—***Pending motions***. While one motion is pending, a second is out of

order. The rationale here is that distinct issues deserve discrete consideration.

■ **Procedural motions**. These motions affect what happens to substantive motions:

—***Motion to adjourn***. Use this motion when all meeting business has been concluded or when the meeting has run past the point of productivity. Although *Robert's Rules* allows boards to interrupt deliberations on a pending issue and adjourn, small boards may want to conclude the immediate discussion first. If they don't want to act immediately, an adequate conclusion would be to defer or table action.

—***Motion to recess***. Use this procedure when a break is needed to get more information or stretch legs. It is in order as long as the meeting will reconvene.

—***Motion to follow the agenda***. Use this motion to help focus attention on issues. It is in order only at the first opportunity to call attention to the agenda.

—***Motion to suspend rules***. Use this motion only for something the board may do legally, but may not do without violating its own rules. Small boards may want to require fewer votes than *Robert's Rules* for this motion to pass — a quorum of the actual board membership, for instance, instead of a two-thirds vote.

—***Motion to divide complex motions***. Use this procedure to divide and conquer a debate that is all over the place, which is a sure indication that the motion has too many parts.

—***Motion to defer or revive consideration***. Use this motion if the board is not prepared to consider something at the moment, but plans to do so later. Small school boards that defer substantive motions may want to set a time limit other than the one in *Robert's Rules* on how long the deferment lasts before the motion expires. Robert's says motions die at the end of the session in which they were tabled; but small boards might want to be able to revive motions for longer periods, say up to 100 days.

—***Motion to postpone action to a certain time or day***. Use this motion if the board is not prepared to act at the moment, but will do so as soon as it gets more information.

—***Motion to call for a vote***. Use this motion when the board appears ready to vote. *Robert's Rules* does not require debate to precede each vote, but small boards might want to have a rule that no vote will be taken until every member has had an opportunity to speak. Some boards may want to put a time limit, says 20 minutes, on board debates.

—***Motion to refer to committee***. Use this motion only if the board has committees authorized to study the issue. It's not good practice to use this motion to kill issues. Unlike *Robert's Rules*, small boards may want to require that anything that goes to committee must be brought back to the board within some time limit, such as 60 days.

—***Motion to amend***. Use this motion to amend a motion before the board. It is in order only when it pertains to the subject matter of the motion

under consideration. However, it may have an intention opposite that of the original motion. One amendment to the amendment is okay, but no more than that should be allowed.

—***Motion to reconsider***. Only a member of the prevailing side of an issue may use this motion to reopen the issue after a vote has been taken. Although *Robert's Rules* allows for reconsideration motions at subsequent meetings, small boards may want to limit reconsideration to the same meeting as that at which the vote was taken.

—***Motion to rescind or repeal***. Use only on items the board may legally rescind or repeal. Do not use on such things as contracts or other two-party agreements.

—***Motion to ratify***. Use this motion to approve or confirm something the board has authority to act on, but which has informally occurred already.

—***Motion to prevent or renew reconsideration***. Use this motion (Robert has none like it) immediately following the defeat of a substantive motion to prevent the board's having to spend meeting time on the same issue before circumstances have had time to change enough to warrant reconsideration. Boards may want to set a time limit, such as six months, before it would be in order to entertain a motion to renew reconsideration.

This segment draws on "Rules of Procedure for Local School Boards," by Bonnie E. Davis, School Law Bulletin, *July 1981, published by the Institute of Government, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

EXHIBIT TWO

Sample "Simple List" Agenda

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
FAIRBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Central School Cafeteria—Fairbury, Nebraska
May 3, 1982—7:30 PM

MEETING AGENDA

1.	**Meeting call to order**	Chairman Boeckner
	1.1 Reading of public meeting notice	
	1.2 Approve April 5 minutes	
	1.3 Additions and acceptance of agenda	
2.	**Approve claims and monthly payroll**	Chairman Boeckner
3.	**East PTA report**	Pam Scholle
	Park PTA report	Carol Drees
4.	**Unfinished business**	Chairman Boeckner
5.	**New business**	
	5.1 Proposed inservice program	Ron Oswald
	5.2 Long range computer plan	Ron Oswald
	5.3 Future of distributive education program	Larry Bornschlegl
	5.4 Driver education program	Larry Bornschlegl
	■ Year 'round or summer only	
	■ Student fee	
	■ Rate of pay for summer instruction	
	5.5 Personnel related	Ron Oswald
	■ Retires, reassignments, leaves of absence, Ron Oswald new hires, recruiting	
	5.6 Set rate of pay for census taker	Chairman Boeckner
6.	**Superintendent's report**	Ron Oswald
7.	**Set date, time, and location of next meeting**	Chairman Boeckner
8.	**Adjourn**	Chairman Boeckner

EXHIBIT THREE

Sample Agenda with Backup Summaries

EXCERPT FROM NORTHAMPTON COUNTY (VA) SCHOOL BOARD AGENDA

Time	Agenda Item	
2:00 p.m.	I.	**CALL TO ORDER:** - Chairman
2:00-2:10	II.	**APPROVAL OF MINUTES** 1. Reading and approval of minutes for February 17, 1982, and March 5, 1982.
2:10-2:20	III.	**COMMUNICATIONS** 2. Letters of commendation. 3. Letter from John R. Morison, President, WHRO, regarding Academic Bowl

(For each action item on the agenda, the following summary sheet is completed.)

(Backup Summary Sheet)

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

SUPPLEMENT TO AGENDA

ITEM: ☐ **Requiring Action** ☐ **Informational**

Subject:

Background:

Status:

Recommendation:

EXHIBIT FOUR

Sample Agenda with Summary and Original Documentation

EXCERPT FROM COLUMBIA HEIGHTS (MINN.), SCHOOL BOARD AGENDA

I. **Approval of minutes of March 9 and March 23, 1982**

II. **Approval of Bills — Treasurer**

III. **Administrative Details/Reminders/Communications**

A. **Administrative Details**
1. Special Board Meeting — April 27, 1982 — 7:00 p.m.
2. AMSD General Meeting — April 28, 1982 — 5:00 p.m.

B. **Reminders**

C. **Communications**

EXCERPT FROM SUPERINTENDENT'S SUMMARY REPORT ON EACH AGENDA ITEM

III. C. **Communications**: I have included in your packet a copy of the letter from the union, signed by Jane Goodell, to Jim regarding the waiving of administrative experience for the position of Director of Curriculum and Instruction. From what I can understand, the letter really grew out of two different backgrounds. The first was a sincere belief that there are some excellent teachers in the school system and that they could effectively handle the position. The second is just as sincere a belief but perhaps more pragmatic in that, if a teacher were appointed to that position, it would mean one less teacher layoff in the system.

I'm not sure that I can adequately describe to you the conflict the superintendent experiences in a situation such as this. On the one hand, you know that there are some excellent people in the school system and that they honestly believe they could do the job. On the other hand, the classroom teacher, no matter how involved that person has been in the school district, may have limited understanding of the complexity of an administrative position which, in an equal status with the business arm, is the second highest in a school system of this size. Suitable experience is based on training and that is why administration is recognized as a separate discipline and as a separate licensure. I very much need the support of a strong administrator in the curriculum area. I also very much need

your help in politely, but firmly, indicating to the teaching staff that we will accept no less.

ORIGINAL DOCUMENTATION THAT SUPPORTS EACH AGENDA ITEM

Ref.: Agenda Item III. C.

April 5, 1982

Jim Lindstrom, Chair
Columbia Heights Board of Education
1400 49th Avenue, N.E.
Columbia Heights, MN 55421

Dear Mr. Lindstrom:

At this time, District #13 is searching for a replacement for the position of Director of Curriculum and Instruction. The qualificiations for this position have been posted for quite some time and applications have been accepted. Unfortunately, many qualified teachers from District #13 have been eliminated in this process because they have been unable to fulfill one of the qualifications: experience as a principal and/or superintendent.

It is the position of Local 710 that we have many qualified teachers in the district who could fulfill the duties of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Many of us have been through several curriculum changes, helping to plan, write, and implement the final product. Others have been in charge of various special projects, including replication grants, HARVEST, University student teacher program, and PATL. Regardless of the above, we all have had experience within this district, and know the structure, people, and programs. We have leaders within the teaching staff who could handle the duties listed.

Therefore, we ask that the qualification of experience as a principal/superintendent be waived for those in this district who may wish to apply; that we be given the time to put together resumes for this application; and that we be considered with outside applications.

I assume that, since the job will not begin until July 1, there is still sufficient time for those of us to apply who wish to do so. We should have had consideration from the beginning of the process by those who tell us we do such a wonderful job in this district. Certainly, we also could do a wonderful job as Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Sincerely,

Jane Liepold Goodell
President, Local 710
Columbia Heights, Minnesota
Federation of Teachers

EXHIBIT FIVE

Consent Calendar Excerpt from Agenda

1.12 **Approve the consent calendar.**

Note: Items under the consent calendar are considered routine, and will be enacted under one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items prior to the time the board votes unless a board member requests an item be removed from the calendar for separate action.

1.12 **Items removed from the consent calendar for separate action:**

1.131_____

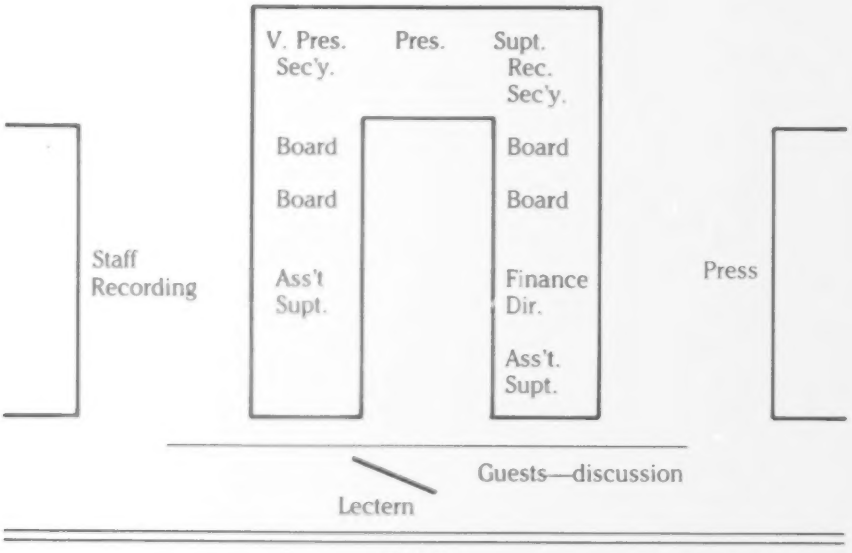
1.132_____

1.133_____

Source: *Duarte (Calif.), Unified School District*

EXHIBIT SIX

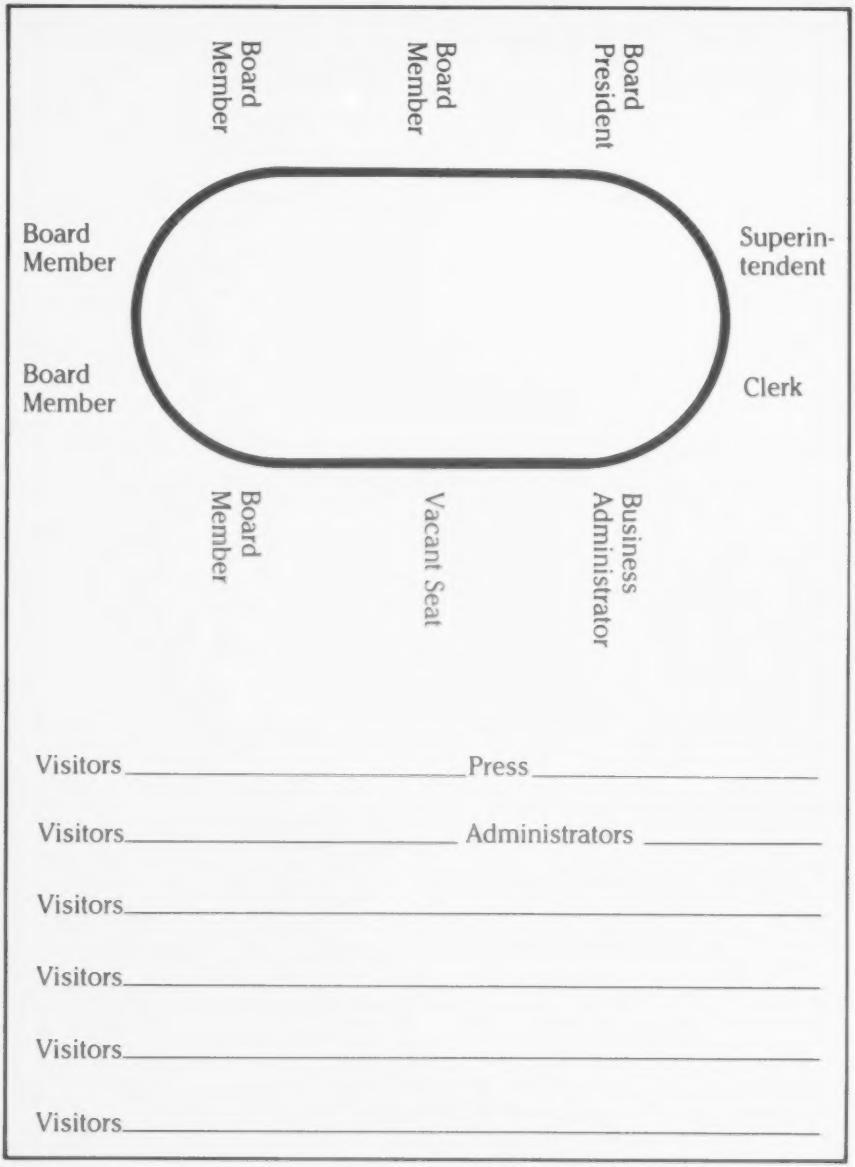
Room Set Up With U-Shaped Table



Source: *Traverse City, (Mich.), Public Schools*

EXHIBIT SEVEN

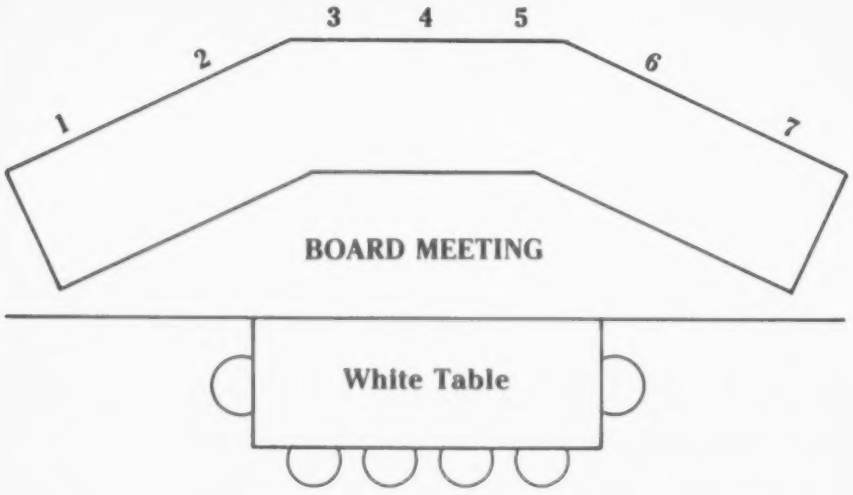
Room Set-Up with Circular Table



Source: *Cazenovia (N.Y.), Central Schools*

EXHIBIT EIGHT

Theater-Style Set-Up



U	U	U	U			U	U	U	U
U	U	U	U			U	U	U	U
U	U	U	U		AISLE	U	U	U	U
U	U	U	U			U	U	U	U
U	U	U	U			U	U	U	U

Source: *Columbia Heights (Mich.) Public Schools*

EXHIBIT NINE

Handy Tools for Boardroom Work

Not every meeting will require all these tools, but every meeting's success may depend on one administrator's reviewing a checklist like this one before each meeting starts. A simple checklist can prompt the memory to deliver to the boardroom that one item, momentarily forgotten but crucial to the smooth conduct of upcoming board business.

For the board. Put board members in comfortable chairs, and offer:

- ☐ Name plates, visible to audience
- ☐ A gavel for the president
- ☐ Water pitchers, water glasses
- ☐ Pencils, pens, pads of paper
- ☐ Ash trays, if smoking permitted
- ☐ Microphones, if needed (test in advance)

For administrators. The superintendent, seated at the board table, deserves all the amenities offered the board. In addition, these items may help the superintendent and other administrators answer questions or help with meeting management.

- ☐ District manual of policy and regulation
- ☐ Current budget
- ☐ Current union contracts
- ☐ Recent newspaper articles about the schools
- ☐ *Robert's Rules of Order*
- ☐ State education law book
- ☐ Enrollment statistics, projections
- ☐ Employee directory
- ☐ Map of district, showing attendance areas
- ☐ School calendar and regular calendar
- ☐ A timer for limiting remarks
- ☐ A telephone nearby for emergencies
- ☐ Refreshments, if planned

For the news media. A well-lighted table or other writing surface helps members of the news media. Place the table near an electronic

outlet, if board policy permits electronic recording of proceedings. On the table, place:

- ☐ Pencils, pens, paper
- ☐ Water, glasses
- ☐ Ash trays, if smoking permitted

For presenters. People who have reports to present often have special needs. Among them:

- ☐ Lectern
- ☐ Microphone (test in advance)
- ☐ Projector, screen
- ☐ Large easels or chalkboard
- ☐ Easel pads, chalk, chalk eraser, crayons, ash trays, water glasses, water pitcher, extension cords, pointer, flashlight
- ☐ Small table for presenters' materials

For the public. These items:

- ☐ Sufficient seating
- ☐ Lectern to address board
- ☐ Microphone hook-up (test in advance)
- ☐ Coat rack
- ☐ Ash trays, if smoking allowed
- ☐ Welcome packets or brochures explaining meeting procedures
- ☐ Copies of the agenda
- ☐ Sufficient parking facilities

EXHIBIT TEN

Sample Welcome Brochure Contents

BOARD MEETING PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

Welcome to a meeting of the Board of Education of the Williamsburg Community School District, Williamsburg, Iowa.

It is the purpose of this brochure to show you how the board of education is structured and how it operates.

Popular control of public education is one of the cornerstones of a free society. The people exercise that control through their board of education. To help you take a more active part in its deliberations and operation, the board has prepared this brochure to explain how you can bring matters of concern to you to the attention of the board.

BOARD MEMBERS

The Williamsburg Community School Board of Education is composed of five citizens elected to serve overlapping terms of three years each. At the end of a term, a board member wishing to continue unsalaried service to the community must be reelected to an additional three-year term. State law does not limit the number of terms a member may serve. Voting for school board positions takes place on the second Tuesday in September.

BOARD MEETINGS

The board of education meets regularly on the second Thursday of each month in the Board Room of the high school. Meetings are called to order at 7:30 p.m. However, by agreement among members, meetings may be called to order at 6:30 p.m. during the winter.

In accordance with the Iowa Code, when it is necessary to hold a meeting at other than the scheduled time, the nature of the meeting shall be stated in the minutes.

The Open Meetings Law requires the posting of the Board Agenda more than 24 hours prior to a scheduled meeting. Topics not included on the agenda may be added only if good cause exists to require expeditious discussion or action on such matters.

One of the first items on the agenda is the recognition of any visitors and representatives who may wish to address the board. A visitor who has been granted permission to speak, may make a brief statement, express a viewpoint, or ask a question regarding matters related to the school system. It should be pointed out that there is no legal requirement that the public be given this opportunity to speak at board meetings. It is a policy of our board to make this time available to resi-

dents of the district. If the pressure of business or other circumstances dictate, however, the board chairman may decide to curtail this policy.

An additional note: The board's function is to make decisions, and time spent answering routine questions or criticisms must be taken from more important board business. If a resident has a question about the operation of the schools, the resident is encouraged to contact the teacher or administrator closest to the situation. Experience has shown that this is the best procedure. The questioner gets the response directly; the board is freed to consider more substantive matters.

Following the "recognition-of-visitors" portion of the meeting, the board proceeds to the other items on the agenda. These items may include:

- Routine business. For efficiency of operation, the board may condense routine business into lists or schedules.
- Reports from members of the board, the superintendent of schools, or staff. These reports are usually on matters relevant to the operation of the schools and do not require formal action.
- Old business, including updating information on items discussed at previous meetings.

CLOSED SESSION

The new statute provides that all meetings of governmental bodies (including school boards and multi-member bodies created by the boards) shall be open sessions unless a closed session is expressly permitted by law. Further, **final action** by any governmental body on any matter (whether discussed in open or closed session) must be taken in open session. A governmental body may hold a closed session only by a affirmative public vote of either two-thirds of the members of the body or of all of the members present at the meeting. A governmental body may hold a closed session only to the extent a closed session meets the guidelines established by statute.

BOARD ACTION

No one person or group of persons acts in the name of the board. When an item of business comes before the board in the form of a motion, it is necessary that a majority of votes in favor of the motion be cast for the board to act.

The board has complete and final control over local school matters subject only to limitation imposed by state law, regulation of the state, and the will of local residents as expressed in district elections.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

The superintendent of schools is appointed by the board of Education and acts as its executive officer in administering the board's policies in the operation of the schools. The superintendent also acts as advisor in keeping the board informed of the needs and progress of the schools. The superintendent is available to the board as a professional

resource, and the superintendent's recommendations normally precede board action on questions relating to recruitment and supervision of professional staff, selection of textbooks and instructional materials, and development of curriculum.

A BOARD MEETING

Meetings of the board of education follow an agenda prepared jointly by the board president and the superintendent of schools. Following the roll call of members, the board proceeds to the agenda items. Agenda items with asterisks(*) beside them are matters that require formal action of the Board.

CONDUCT AND REMARKS OUT OF ORDER

Undue interruptions or other interference with the orderly conduct of board of education business cannot be allowed. The presiding officer may terminate the speaker's privilege to speak if, after being called to order, the speaker persists in improper conduct or remarks.

CHARGES, COMPLAINTS, OR CHALLENGES

At a public meeting of the board of education, no person shall orally initiate charges or complaints against individual employees of the district or challenge instructional material used in the district. All such charges, complaints, or challenges shall be presented to the superintendent of schools in accordance with established written board policy.

Thank you for joining us. We look forward to your continued interest in and support of your public schools. This support will help guarantee their excellence.

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Source: *Williamsburg, (Iowa) Community Schools*

EXHIBIT ELEVEN

Sample Sign-in Sheet for Those Who Wish to Address the Board

REQUEST OF VISITORS
BOARD OF EDUCATION
WILLIAMSBURG COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
WILLIAMSBURG, IOWA

Flora Heitshusen, President
John Tiernan, Vice-President
Judy Blythe, Member
Roger Kretchmer, Member
Robert Scoville, Member

We welcome you to this meeting of your board of education and will be glad to listen to your opinion on problems the board is considering, or any constructive statement or complaint you may wish to make.

To know of your presence, and your interest, we request that you complete this form and hand it to Mrs. Liekweg, Secretary.

(Please Print)

Name_____

Date_____

Address_____

If you represent an organization, please indicate here_____

If you have a pupil in our schools, please indicate here_____

Please list the agenda item that you wish to discuss with the board of education:

_____

_____

The board of education follows a written agenda, a copy of which is available to assist you in participating in the meeting.

If you have indicated on this form your desire to speak, at the appropriate time, please rise and give your name. You may have the floor a maximum of four minutes. If you speak more than once, please

limit your remarks to two minutes. The president may limit the time, but each person wishing to speak will be permitted to do so.

The board of education wishes the public to be advised that, on certain occasions, time may be of the essence for board consideration and action. In such cases, the board reserves the right to eliminate or severely restrict the time allowed for public participation.

Dale Pierce
District Superintendent

Source: *Williamsburg, Iowa, Community Schools*

EXHIBIT TWELVE

How to Reduce Board Meeting Time

If this consumes too much time:	**Try this:**
Idle gossip, hearsay, school community scuttlebutt each member has heard since the board last met	***President***—call for order. **Superintendent**—keep in touch with board members between meetings, get them in the habit of passing along public or staff complaints to you.
Members trying to administer	**President**—call for board to focus on issues, and discussion by citing policy and referring administration to superintendent. **Superintendent**—keep administrative items off agenda, train board members in policy role, suggest abolishing standing board committees.
Talk that is repetitious, trivial, irrelevant, personal, petty, garrulous, grandstanding, and so on	**President**—move that agenda be followed. **Superintendent**—plan annual retreat for board members and president to set or review rules of procedure and appropriate participant and leadership behavior.
Discussions on issues about which board members are uninformed	**President**—move that board defer action until next meeting. **Superintendent**—send advance information with agendas, plus a recommendation; call before meeting to see if board members have done homework, or have any questions.
Routine matters such as approving purchase orders, reading minutes	**President**—move that all routine items be acted upon together. **Superintendent**—use consent agenda.

Nonagenda items introduced by board members or audience at meeting	**President**—ask board members if they believe the item is (1) in the board's domain and (2) urgent enough to warrant discussion at this meeting. **Superintendent**—recommend policy so board can consistently handle future requests to add agenda items
Late starts, late finishes	**President**—start on time no matter what, and stick to agenda. **Superintendent**—henceforth, note time allowed for each item right on the agenda; and rehearse the agenda with the president so the president is fully informed about what could happen with each item.
President's not knowing how to guide discussion or end it	**President**—evaluate own behavior, to guide discussion or end it, be open to constructive criticism. **Superintendents**—sign up the president for the next state school boards association leadership workshop.
Argument grows because president takes side instead of arbitrating	**President**—appoint another board member to replace you temporarily. **Superintendent**—keep working with president on leadership skills.
Tempers flare, discussion passes point of productive return	**President**—call for recess or point of productive return, calmly summarize points and suggest deferral until next meeting. **Superintendent**—help board review policy on handling controversy, pertinent rules of procedure, and necessary participant skills.
Public takes over	**President**—call for order, remind public to address only you. **Superintendent**—recommend that board review policy on public participation to ensure that it is comprehensive and enforceable.

EXHIBIT THIRTEEN

Sample Staff Bulletin

THE COMMUNICATOR
A Newsletter for T.C.A.P.S. Staff

November 10, 1981 Traverse City (Mich.), Area Public Schools

This is certainly a busy time of our school year. The board is deeply involved in many aspects of curriculum review. Our staff committees are active and hard at work. There are five or six curriculum areas that we expect to critically review and bring desired revisions to the attention of the board before the end of the year.

I compliment the work of the committees and the Curriculum Council. The curriculum requirements and expectations are the heart of any school system. Please keep in touch with committees working on your subject or grade level. Also, we hope you will take the time to stop in at board meetings when these important recommendations are being discussed.

Have a happy Thanksgiving.

(Signed)
Vern Oxender
Superintendent

BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

Action Items

A. Consent Items
   1. Five teachers were granted tenure placement.
   2. Citizen Advisory Committees from each school were approved. There are currently 178 citizens involved in these Advisory Councils.

B. Motion Items
   1. The Board granted approval of the elective Health Education Pilot course for grades 9 through 12. Staff steering committee members include Pat Lewallen, Glenn Merchant, Renee Thompson, and Sue Wilson.

Discussion Items

A. The first reading of policies regarding personnel, 4000 series and bylaws, 9210 and 9230 were discussed and altered. The board will vote for adoption at the December meeting.

B. The board authorized the administration to move ahead and prepare further information and drawings of the proposed junior high physical education facility. If the board does approve the plan, the new gym facility tentatively would open on September 1, 1982.

C. The transportation staff presented statistics and costs of bus replacements for board consideration. Serious consideration is being given to reconditioning a number of older units to see if the practice would be cost effective.

EXHIBIT FOURTEEN

Excerpt from Minutes

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 94, DUPAGE COUNTY, ILLINOIS APRIL 20, 1982

The regular meeting of the Board of Education was called to order at 7:48 p.m. by President Hapgood. On roll call the followng members were present: Marvin E. Beckman, Richard E. Sackett, Norma Wienecke, Lorrie Ann Kovac, Lawrence C. Hapgood. Arrived after roll call: John J. Schlenker. Absent: David W. Geick.

Also present were: Richard M. Kamm, Superintendent; Richard P. DuFour, Principal; James L. Mast, Director of Business; William F. Renner, Administrative Assistant; Shirley L. Woomer, Recording Secretary; and interested citizens.

Approval of Minutes Regular Meeting March 16, 1982

Motion by Beckman, second by Wienecke, to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of March 16, 1982, as amended.

Ayes: Sackett, Wienecke, Kovac, Beckman, Hapgood.
Nays: None. Motion carried 5-0.

Adoption of Revised Policy BBE: School Attorney

Motion by Kovac, second by Schlenker, to adopt the proposed revison of Policy BBE: School Attorney, a copy to be made part of the minutes.

Ayes: Beckman, Sackett, Schlenker, Wienecke, Kovac, Hapgood.
Nays: None. Motion carried 6-0.

Adoption of Policy BCBA: Meetings Time and Place

Motion by Kovac, second by Wienecke, to adopt the proposed revision of Policy BCBA: Meetings—Time and Place, a copy to be made part of the minutes.

Ayes: Sackett, Schlenker, Wienecke, Kovac, Beckman, Hapgood.
Nays: None. Motion carried 6-0.

EXHIBIT FIFTEEN

School Board Meeting Evaluation Checklist

	Adequate	Needs Improvement
LONG-RANGE PLANNING FOR MEETINGS		
1. The board and superintendent have clearly divided and regularly observe their responsibilities for policy making and administration.	_____	_____
2. The superintendent has a set procedure for keeping in touch with board members between meetings.	_____	_____
3. The board has a set procedure for orienting new members and developing the skills of the entire board.	_____	_____
4. The board's own rules of procedure are written out in policy form and include:		
a. Types of formal and informal meetings	_____	_____
b. Parliamentary rules	_____	_____
c. Rules for public participation	_____	_____
d. News media services at meetings	_____	_____
e. Reporting board meeting action	_____	_____
f. Self-evaluation	_____	_____
5. The board has a comprehensive, up-to-date, well-organized, written collection of policies on all school operations.	_____	_____

SHORT-RANGE PLANNING FOR MEETINGS

6. The agenda, prepared in accordance with policy, is planned in advance with the audience in mind, so that meetings are short and contain few surprises. _____ _____

7. Agenda content:
   a. Is based on annual planning calendar _____ _____
   b. Is based on last month's agenda _____ _____
   c. Is based on ideas from staff, board members, and the public _____ _____
   d. Contains no administrative items, is appropriate to the board's role _____ _____
   e. Is planned by superintendent and president together _____ _____
   f. Contains time limits for each item _____ _____
   g. Has a good balance of items _____ _____
   h. Includes a recommendation and back-up information on each item whether items are for action or discussion. _____ _____
   i. Includes the names of responsible staff persons, policy, and legal references related to each agenda item _____ _____

8. Agenda items are ordered with the meeting's pace and tone in mind. _____ _____

9. Agenda format is professional, consistent, easy-to-use. _____ _____

10. Routine business items are merged into one umbrella item or "consent calendar." _____ _____

11. The school board meeting facilities
    a. Are in a centrally located building _____ _____
    b. Are in a room matched to the meeting's purposes and size _____ _____

c. Have seating for the board that invites public participation when desired, underscores board authority, encourages board member interaction, and accommodates press _____ _____
d. Are equipped with necessary references (policy manual, current budget, calendars, etc.) _____ _____
e. Accommodate board rules about no smoking, late comers, etc. _____ _____

12. Meeting participants
a. Are notified well in advance _____ _____
b. Are selected by certain set criteria (presence necessary for decisions, have information to give or receive) _____ _____
c. Receive agendas far enough in advance to do homework _____ _____
d. Are prompted to do homework, if necessary, and called the morning of the meeting _____ _____

BOARD MEETING PERFORMANCE

13. The chairperson knows the job, works to improve leadership skills. _____ _____

14. Other board officers back up the chairperson in the effort to set exemplary standards of boardsmanship. _____ _____

15. All board members do their homework, hone participation skills, put board before self. _____ _____

16. The superintendent knows his or her correct role at meetings, does not interfere or interrupt board deliberations, but stands by with information and is willing to help deal with conflicts.

17. All participants know and observe set rules for dealing with conflict.

18. The public and press feel welcome. _____ _____

FOLLOWING UP ON BOARD ACTION

19. The superintendent promptly:
    a. Notifies individuals of action that affects them _____ _____
    b. Gets out staff, press, and community bulletins _____ _____
    c. Follows through on board directives and board member requests and questions _____ _____
    d. Prepares and distributes minutes _____ _____
    e. Helps the board evaluate meeting effectiveness _____ _____
    f. Starts planning the next meeting. _____ _____

Inclusion or exclusion of policy topics in this section does not necessarily reflect the value or importance AASA and NSBA place on these policies. Also, the samples that are provided are not meant to represent all of the policies a board needs to enhance its management of meetings. There are a number of topics addressed in this book that a board should address in policy. Not all are illustrated by a sample policy.

(Sample Policy)
BOARD-SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIP

The Board of Education believes that the legislation of policies is a function of the school board and that the execution of the policies should be the function of the superintendent of schools.

While the Board reserves to itself the ultimate decision of all matters concerning policy and expenditures of funds, delegation by the Board of its executive powers to the superintendent provides flexibility for the superintendent to manage the school system according to the provisions of the Board's policies and decisions, and allows Board members to devote their time to policy making and appraisal functions.

The Board holds the superintendent responsible for the administration of its policies and regulations, the execution of Board actions and decisions, the operation of school and library programs and services, and for keeping the Board informed about school system activities, operations, and concerns.

The Board will strive to procure, when a vacancy exists, the best professional leader available for the superintendent's position. The Board as a whole, and individual members, will:

1. Give the superintendent complete administrative authority for properly discharging all professional and legal responsibilities and duties.
2. Hold all meetings of the board in the presence of the superintendent except when the superintendent's contract and salary are under consideration.
3. Refer all concerns to the superintendent for appropriate investigation and action.
4. Provide adequate safeguards for the superintendent and his/her staff members so they can discharge their professional and legal responsibilities and duties.

The superintendent will assist the Board in making decisions and establishing policies by giving Board members relevant facts, information, and reports. The superintendent may not perform, cause, or allow to be performed any act that is unlawful, in violation of commonly accepted business and professional ethics, in violation of any contracts into which

the Board has entered, or in violation of policies and regulations adopted by the Board.

Source: *Grosse Pointe Public School System, Grosse Pointe, Michigan*
Date: *11/8/82*

(Sample Policy)
NEW BOARD MEMBER ORIENTATION

Because the Board, as the policy-making authority of the Jefferson County School System, is responsible to the public for the success of all educational services offered by the shcool system, and because that success is directly dependent upon each Board member's comprehension of the workings of the county's system-wide operations and each member's ability to participate meaningfully in the decision-making process that governs this system, it shall be the policy of the Board to provide, as soon as practicable, for the orientation of new members. The purpose of the orientation is to help new members become quickly acquainted with their Board duties and responsibilities.

Orientation of new Board members will begin at the outset of their candidacy and follow through each step of the election process. Prior to the primary elections, candidates will receive from the Board, upon the recommendation of the superintendent and through the Public Information Department, a brief overview of the Jefferson County School System. They also will be informed of and given the opportunity to attend Board meetings and various other meetings being held throughout the school system.

Following the primaries, nominees will be placed on a mailing list to receive notices of Board and other meetings and summary reports of Board action. Nominees also will be informed that additional information pertinent to each Board agenda item is available to them through the school system's Public Information Department.

The third step of orientation will be carried out after the general election in November. The new members will continue to attend meetings throughout the system and will be notified of and given the opportunity to attend sessions of the Alabama Association of School Boards. The new members will be invited to meet with the superintendent and other administrative personnel to discuss services to be performed for the Board, and to give them the opportunity to request any other information they may deem desirable. Each new member also will receive an orientation packet from the Public Information Department as part of an orientation program conducted by the Public Information Department. The packet will include:

1. A copy of the Alabama School Code. (Title 52)
2. A copy of the *Board's Policies, Rules and Regulations*.
3. A copy of the current school budget and the latest financial statement.
4. Information on school enrollments, qualifications of teachers, transportation, buildings, and other items.
5. Information on the program of instruction.

6. An analysis of major problems and issues faced by the school system.
7. Any other materials relevant to their duties and responsibilities as members of the Jefferson County Board of Education.

Source: *Jefferson County School System, Birmingham, Alabama*
Date: *11/16/76*

(Sample Policy)

SCHOOL BOARD CONFERENCES, CONVENTIONS, WORKSHOPS

Attendance at meetings, such as conferences and conventions, directly or indirectly related to education or to school matters, should be encouraged for the values that they have to the school system and to the professional growth of Board members.

Board members will report to the Board their findings following their attendance at such meetings.

The Board President and the superintendent of schools will notify the Board members of all such scheduled meetings.

Included among such activities are conferences, workshops, local, state and national conventions, and district-sponsored—meetings.

Toward this end, the Board will:

1. Establish a calendar of such events and require the Board secretary to maintain the calendar and keep the Board informed on upcoming events.
2. Decide which meetings are most promising and approve Board members' attendance at them.
3. Designate members who will represent the Board at such meetings.
4. Provide funds in the budget to cover expenses.
5. Reimburse Board members for out-of-pocket expenses as may be legally permitted.
6. Require Board members to report to the Board as a whole within a reasonable period of time following their return to the district.

Legal References: Education Law
- Sec. 1618 — NYS School Boards Association
- Sec. 1709 — Powers and Duties of the Board of Education
- Sec. 1711 — Appointment of Superintendent of Schools
- Sec. 1804 — Boards of Education; Election; Powers and Duties
- Sec. 2118 — Expenses of the School District Officers

Source: *East Ramapo Central School District, Spring Valley, New York*
Date: *10/5/77*
District Size: *PK-PG; 13,355*

(Sample Policy)

REGULAR BOARD MEETINGS

Meetings of the Board will ordinarily be held in the board room of the Administration Building, 1215 Quail Street, Lakewood, Colorado, 80215.

Upon a notice by the president at least two weeks prior to the meeting, or upon a unanimous vote of the Board, meetings of the Board may be

moved from the Administration Building. The public will be given due notice of any change in meeting place.

All meetings, except for periods in which the Board is in executive session, will be open to the public.

Source: *Jefferson County School District R-1, Lakewood, Colorado*
Date: *8/1/80*
Legal Ref: *C.R.S. 22-32-108 (1), (2), (3), (4), (5)*

(Sample Policy)
SPECIAL BOARD MEETINGS

In accordance with state law, special meetings may be held as determined by the Board of Directors, or called by the president, or by the secretary upon the request of a majority of the members of the Board.

Notice of special meetings will be given in writing by the secretary at least 24 hours (or in compliance with state law) in advance of such meetings. The agenda for all special meetings will be limited to the item or items for which the special meeting is called.

Special meetings will be held in the location officially designated for regular meetings unless otherwise determined by the Board in a previous legal session.

Source: *Williamsburg Community Schools, Iowa*
Date: *2/14/80*
Legal Ref.: *Code of Iowa, Chapter 279.2*

(Sample Policy)
EXECUTIVE SESSIONS

All Board meetings will be open to the public except those authorized by the Brown Act and Education Code Section 54957. The Board will reconvene in public meeting for the purpose of taking final action on a matter discussed in closed session.

The following are the legally recognized reasons for holding a closed session:

1. The consideration of the appointment, employment, or dismissal of a public employee, unless such employee requests a public hearing.
2. The hearing of complaints or charges brought against a public employee, unless such employee requests a public hearing.
3. Discussions with a Board's representative prior to and during consultations and discussions with representatives of employee organizations on matters of salaries, salary schedules, or compensation in the form of fringe benefits.
4. The consideration of matters affecting the national security.
5. The consideration of legal matters within the attorney/client privilege.
6. Discussions with the attorney general, district attorney, sheriff, chief of police, or their respective deputies on matters posing a threat to the security of public buildings, public services, or facilities.
7. Discussions with a state conciliator who had intervened as authorized by law. This exception is due to the privileged character of a state con-

ciliator's records, and to allow a board to better review its position and instruct its designated representatives.

8. In consideration of the suspension of, or disciplinary action or any other action including expulsion, in connection with any pupil of the district, if a public hearing would cause information to be divulged concerning pupils that would violate Education Code Sections 49073 or 49076. The pupil's parent or guardian may request that the hearing be public. Whether the meeting is open or closed, the final action taken must be at a public meeting and must be made a public record of the district.

Source: *Duarte Unified School District, California*
Date: *2/24/82*
Legal Ref.: *Education Code 35145, 35146, 48914, 49073, 49076, Government Code 54954, 54956, 54957, 54957.6*

(Sample Policy)
PUBLIC HEARINGS

In conducting public hearings required by law, and any other hearings as it deems advisable, the Board will adhere strictly to any statutory requirements that apply to the specific type of hearing and shall seek to conduct the hearings in a fair, open, and objective manner, giving all persons involved an equal opportunity to be heard.

The president of the Board, or another member at his or her and the Board's approval, will preside at hearings before the Board.

At the beginning of the proceedings, the attending public will be informed of particular rules that it will be following in regard to questions, remarks, rebuttals, time limitations, or other rules necessary to give everyone an opportunity to be heard.

In conformance with customary hearing procedures, statements and supporting information will be presented first by the Board, or by others on behalf of the Board. To address the Board, citizens must be recognized by the chair, and all remarks must be addressed to the chair and be germane to the topic.

Hearings on the Dismissal of Tenured Teachers

In hearing any charges against a teacher that may lead to his or her dismissal, the Board will follow all applicable procedures prescribed in the Colorado Teacher Employment, Dismissal, and Tenure Act.

Source: *Boulder Valley Public Schools, Boulder, Colorado*
Date: *Current practice codified 1978*
Legal Refs.: *C.R.S. 22-63-117(1) through (12)*

(Sample Policy)
BOARD COMMITTEES

Board committees may be appointed by the Board president, subject to Board approval, to serve for no longer than the ensuing organization meeting of the Board unless reappointed. These committees will be consultative in nature and will consider such matters as may be referred to them by the superintendent or the Board.

The following rules will govern the appointment and function of such committees:

1. The committee shall be established through action of the Board.
2. The committee chairman and members shall be appointed by the Board.
3. The committee members shall be provided with a list of the committees.
4. The board president shall be an ex-officio member of all Board committees.
5. **Advisory members**: Community, staff, or student representative may be appointed to serve as advisory members to Board committees for a specific length of time and shall be instructed in their advisory status. Such advisory members will be named by the Board; staff and student advisory members may be named by the Board only upon the superintendent's recommendation.
6. The status of ex-officio members and advisory members of Board committees shall be as follows:
   a. These members may not be included in considering whether a quorum of the committee is present.
   b. These members may not vote on recommendations to be made by the committee to the Board.
   c. Ex-officio and/or advisory members may present in writing a minority report to the Board whenever they disagree with recommendations made by the committee to the Board.
7. All reports of Board committees will be made directly to the Board. Board committees will not release reports to the public without prior Board approval.

In matters regarding the employment of school personnel, the Board will act as a committee-of-the-whole.

Source: *School District of Superior, Superior, Wisconsin*
Date: *1977*
District Size: *K-12; 7,213 students*

(Sample Policy)
WORK SESSIONS, RETREATS AND CONFERENCES

On an annual basis, the Board will consider a retreat involving up to 100 teachers, administrators, classified staff, and Board members with the general purpose of improving the instructional program, and improving communications between the various constituencies of the school district.

The specific purposes for such a workshop shall be planned during

the spring of the preceding year. These plans shall include the various objectives to be met and the anticipated cost of such a workshop. This cost, then, will be considered as a budget item for the enusing year. Issues to be considered at a retreat may include:

1. Improvement of general curriculum and instruction.
2. Improvement of communication skills, community relations and community services.
3. Timely, special issues such as upcoming tax or bond elections, district unification, and accreditation.

Source: *Mountain View-Los Altos Union High School District, Mountain View, California*
Date: *1972*

(Sample Policy)
AGENDA PREPARATION AND DISSEMINATION

The superintendent shall prepare all agendas for meetings of the board. In doing so, the superintendent shall consult, as necessary, with the board president and secretary, and appropriate members of the administrative staff.

Items of business may be suggested by any board member, staff member or citizen of the district. All items to be placed on the Board agenda must be provided to the Board president or superintendent by Wednesday noon prior to the meeting. Items will be placed on the agenda by direction of the Board or at the discretion of the president and/or the superintendent. Items that may be controversial should be carefully documented.

Topics introduced after the agenda is prepared for a regular Board meeting will not receive Board action unless an emergency situation exists. These items may be presented, however, under the agenda items "acknowledgment of guests" or "miscellaneous." In the majority of cases, the item will be tabled and referred for study and recommendation by the administration. If an item necessitates Board consideration, it will be placed on a future agenda.

Supporting materials for agendas should contain:

1. Statistics when applicable
2. Alternatives considered prior to the recommendation
3. Ramifications of the recommendation
4. Background information leading to the recommendation.

Source: *Forest Hills Public Schools, Grand Rapids, Michigan*
Date: *8/17/77*
District Size: *K-12, 4,586 students*

(Sample Policy)
AGENDA FORMAT

The presentation of agenda items by the superintendent of the Kent Intermediate School District will follow the format listed below:

A. General Business
   1. Call to order
   2. Questions and/or statements from visitors
   3. Approval of minutes
   4. Allowing bills
   5. Fund balances

B. Recommended Action
   1. Old business
   2. New business

C. Reports

D. Discussion

E. Information

F. Future Plans

G. Adjournment.

The Board, by a simple majority vote of those members elected and serving, will have the authority to change the order of presentation when it deems a change necessary to expedite consideration of pressing or time-consuming matters.

Source: *Kent Intermediate School District, Grand Rapids, Michigan*
Date: *5/5/80*

(Sample Policy)
QUORUM

A majority of the full membership of the school committee, or three members, shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. However, a vote to adjourn into executive session to discuss those items allowed by law, requires three-fifths (3/5) of the members present and voting.

Source: *Madawaska Public Schools, Maine*
Date: *1978*

(Sample Policy)
RULES OF ORDER

Except as otherwise provided by law, by regulation of the Department of Educational and Cultural Services, or by policies of this school committee, meetings of the committee shall be conducted in accordance with *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised*.

Source: *Madawaska Public Schools, Madawaska, Maine*
Date: *1978*

(Sample Policy)
VOTING METHODS

Majority Vote Required, with Roll Call

The affirmative vote of a majority of all members of the Board, duly recorded, showing how each member voted, will be required in order to take action on the following subjects:

1. Fixing length of school term
2. Adopting textbooks
3. Appointing district superintendents, assistant district superintendents, associate superintendents, principals, and teachers
4. Appointing tax collectors and other appointees
5. Levying and assessing taxes
6. Purchasing, selling or condemning land
7. Locating new buildings or changing the location of old ones
8. Creating or increasing any indebtedness
9. Adopting courses of study
10. Establishing additional schools or departments
11. Designating depositories for school funds
12. Entering into contracts of any kind, including contracts for the purchase of fuel or any supplies, where the amount involved exceeds one hundred dollars ($100)
13. Fixing salaries or compensation of officers, teachers, or other appointees of the Board
14. Adopting the annual budget.

Two-Thirds Vote Required, with Roll Call

The affirmative vote of two-thirds of all members of the Board, duly recorded, showing how each member voted, will be required in order to take action on the following:

1. Incurring any temporary debt or borrowing money upon an obligation under the seal of the school district
2. Transfer of appropriation
3. Dismissing professional personnel after a hearing.

Vote on Relative of Board Member

An affirmative vote of five members of the Board, excluding the relative, duly recorded, showing how each member voted, will be required for the appointment as an employee of any person related to a member of the Board in the degree as defined in Section 1111 of the Public School Code of 1949.

Other Matters, Roll Call Not Required

On all other matters, the Board may take action by voice vote, provided that on any matter a roll call will be required upon the request of at least two members of the Board.

Source: *Williamsport School District, Pennsylvania*
Date: *Current 1982*

(Sample Policy)
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS

All regular and special meetings of the Board will be open to the public. Because the Board desires to hear the viewpoints of citizens throughout the district, it will schedule one or more periods during each meeting for public participation. It may set a time limit on the length of this period and/or a time limit for individual speakers.

Comments and questions at a regular meeting may deal with any topic related to the Board's conduct of the schools. Comments at special meetings must be related to the call of the meeting.

The Board president will be responsible for recognizing all speakers. To maintain proper order and to adhere to any set time limits, all speakers must properly identify themselves. Questions asked by the public will, when possible, be answered immediately by the president or referred to staff members present for appropriate reply. Questions requiring investigation will be referred to the superintendent for consideration and later response.

Members of the public will not be recognized by the president as the Board conducts its official business except when the Board schedules in advance an interim public discussion period on a particular item.

Source: *Hemlock Public Schools, Michigan*
Date: *1980*
Legal Refs.: *General School Laws, 15.213-.246; 15.261-.275*

(Sample Policy)
REPORTING BOARD MEETING BUSINESS

As part of its ongoing effort to keep the staff and public fully informed concerning its affairs and actions, the Board through the superintendent shall institute and maintain effective and appropriate procedures for the prompt dissemination of information about decisions made at all Board meetings.

Releases to the press and brief summaries of Board meeting actions prepared for distribution to staff members and parents are regarded as appropriate media of information for meeting the requirements of this policy.

Source: *Columbia Heights Public Schools, Minnesota*
Date: *Current 1982*

(Sample Policy)
DUTIES OF BOARD PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT

The Board chairperson will preside at the Board meetings, perform all duties imposed by the statutes, and perform such other duties as may be prescribed by law or by action of the Ministry.

The chairperson will decide questions of order at Board meetings.

The chairperson will have the same right as other members to offer

resolutions, to offer motions, to discuss questions, and to vote thereon, and will conduct Board meetings in accordance with *Burinot's Rules of Order*.

The chairperson will appoint all Board representatives or Board committees and he will be an ex-officio member of all such committees.

The chairperson will sign all official district documents that require the signature of the chairperson's office.

The chairperson will prepare the agenda for all Board meetings in consultation with the secretary-treasurer and the superintendent.

The vice-chairperson will have all the powers and duties of the chairperson in his or her absence or during his or her disability, and such other powers and duties as the Board may from time to time determine.

Source: *School District #32, Hope, British Columbia*
Date: *1981*
District Size: *K-12; 1,560 students*

(Sample Policy)
MINUTES

Complete and accurate minutes of all regular and special meetings shall be kept by the Board secretary. The minutes shall constitute the official record of the proceedings of each meeting and shall be made available for record of the proceedings of each meeting and shall be made available for public inspection in the superintendent's office during regular office hours.

A preliminary copy of the minutes shall be made available to Board members as soon as practicable after each meeting.

Formal consideration for approval of minutes shall be placed on the agenda of regular Board meetings only. Presented for approval will be the minutes of the preceding regular meeting, as well as the minutes of any other Board meetings held in the interval between the preceding and the present regular meeting.

Minutes of Executive Sessions

The minutes of the regular or special meeting during which the executive session was called shall record that such an executive session was held, stating the topic of the session as permitted under the terms of the law.

Source: *Boulder Valley Public Schools, Boulder, Colorado*
Adopted: *8/9/76*
Revised: *Date of manual adoption*
Legal Refs.: *C.R.S. 22-32-106*
C.R.S. 22-32-109(1)(e)
Cross Ref.: *BDC, Executive Sessions*

(Sample Policy)

DUTIES OF THE BOARD SECRETARY

The duties of the secretary to the Board will be:

1. To be present at all meetings to keep an accurate journal of Board proceedings.
2. To furnish at the opening of each meeting a correct copy of the minutes of the last meeting to be read, corrected, and approved.
3. To perform any other duties required by law or by the Board.
4. To send written notice of regular meetings prior to each meeting to each Board member and to the Board treasurer. The notice shall include: the minutes of the previous meeting, and a short statement relative to any business to be presented.

Source: *Belle Fourche School District #9-1, Belle Fourche, South Dakota*
Date: *1981*
District Size: *K-12, 1,276*

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Holding Effective Board Meetings

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